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落ちてきた龍王と滅びゆく魔女の国Ⅲ

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落ちてきた龍王と滅びゆく魔女の国Ⅲ

カサンドラ王国軍二千を降したナーガたちは、勢いにのってエインの砦攻略戦に乗り出す。ヴィータらスレイマーヤー族の協力もとりつけ計画は着々と進行するが、シュバイツ川の警戒にあたっていたノノエルが、ひょんなことから敵の部隊長ライバッハを生け捕りにしたことで状況は一変する。魔女たちが普通の女の子にしか見えないことに戸惑うライバッハ。かたや、ライバッハが思っていた人間像とずいぶん違うことに首を傾げる魔女たち。そんなとき、砦に帰ってきたユウキが「人間の捕虜は殺す！」とライバッハに詰め寄って……？　ナーガの掲げる魔女たちが目指す理想郷、“人と魔女が共存する世界”。これは、その大きな一歩となる戦いの物語である――。

落ちてきた雑王と
滅びゆく魔女の国
III

「これが吾の魔法。
人呼んで『奏の軽重』よ。
どうじゃ、動けんじゃろうが」

「退かないと、
あんたから
切り刻むけど？」
「は！
やってみろよ。
おまえの風刃は、
あたしには
利かねえぞ！」

～祝宴～

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Ochitekita Ryuuou to Horobiyuku Majo no Kuni

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ハインドラー族

ハリガン

ハインドラー族の長。
魔法で髪を自在に操る。

アイス

温厚で面倒見がよいが、
怒ると怖い。
怪力を誇る。

レラ

理知的で冷静。
ナーガのいた世界に
興味を示す。

ユウキ

風を操る魔女。
人間の男が大キライ。

クゥ

物静かな魔女。
身体に巻きつけた
革帯を操る。

ノノエル

水を操る魔女。
誰に対しても
敬語を使う。

スレイマーヤー族

ヴィータ

スレイマーヤー族の長。
幼い容姿だが、
強力な重力魔法を使う。

エリュシオーネ

ヴィータの右腕。
マンテラからマンテラへ
移動する魔法を使う。

人間側

ライバッハ

カサンドラ王国に
仕える中隊長。

魔女一派

ナーガ

龍王の名を持つ青年。
“異界”から落ちてきた。

ケイ

活発なムードメーカー。
身体を硬化させて戦う。

あらすじ

――その男は“異界”から落ちてきた。

争いの絶えぬ戦乱の世界に。

魔女に拾われ一宿一飯の恩を受けた男は、
魔女たちによって“龍王”の名をいただいた。

カサンドラ王国兵三百の進軍に対し、
ナーガは数人の魔女を率いてこれを打ち破る。
続く二千の軍勢にも、知謀をこらし
わずか二十の魔女を率いてこれを退けた。

ナーガの次なる目標は、
王国兵の出撃基地となった“エインの砦”の奪取。
人に追われ滅ぼされんばかりだった魔女たちの、
はじめての進攻が始まろうとしていた――。

N
W
E
S
Map
外海
大陸
西の辺境
(西果ての半島)
西の内海
東の内海
拡大図
カサンドラ王国
支配領域
黒の森
レヤバイン川
インドラー一族
支配領域

プロローグ1

Prologue 1

With barely 20 people, Harrigan and Naga's party had managed to prevent Kasandora's army from their attempted invasion of the black forest. From the witches' perspective, it was already a great victory worthy of shouting for joy; nevertheless, it still wasn't enough for Naga to be content with.
For the sake of creating a world where both the witches and humans can coexist, it was necessary for him to assume an increasingly aggressive attitude. So as to carry out that principle, he decided to begin with the capture of Fort Ein.
Gathering the witches, who were the center of his plans, Naga held a strategic meeting for that purpose, or rather, what he referred to as military assessment.

Since Naga planned to use the 1st fort as their frontline base, he continued to hole himself up inside of it.

"Guess we'll have to observe the Schweiz River."

Saying that, he looked around at the witches who had gathered inside a single residential room in the 1st fort.

Harrigan asked him while looking doubtful:

"Are you saying that Kasandora's army might cross the river once again so as to attack us?"
"No, the chances for that are slim. It might even be possible to ignore them altogether. Still, the purpose of this observation is to find out whether or not they will start any new movement."
"Is there any need for us to continue doing tactical movements since they probably won't cross to attack us?"

Not just Harrigan, the other witches also turned and looked strangely at Naga, whose words weren't understandable to them.

(Ah, so it was about that? It won't do unless I explain the details of this plan to them? Should I say… maybe this is too harsh on them because they don't have much experience? Or maybe, it's due to them having fought in peculiar battles so far?)

"For instance" – Naga explained to them once he gave a concrete example.

"Establishing a defensive position to prepare against the witches… seems to be the best they can do, right?"
"I see."
"However, them crossing the river is not very likely to happen. But at the same time, they can't help but want to protect themselves by guarding the path into their territory. What's

more, I think that Kasandora, who sustained heavy damage from the last battle, won't have any spare power to establish any major defensive positions or build new forts."
"And yet, they are going to watch over the river?"

"Of course." – Naga nodded and replied once Harrigan asked.

"Despite saying that the probability is low, it's not impossible, you see. Therefore, we can't eliminate the possibility that they will send new troops to this side of the river. Considering all the possibilities and taking the right measures beforehand are essential for our final victory."

"I, Is that so? Since we trust you on that matter, it's not like we doubt you, but…"

Harrigan, who relied on Naga's extensive knowledge regarding battles, said so while consenting. Following that, Ais raised her right hand.

"In that case, how are we supposed to watch over the river? It looks like we would need to mobilize all our members, were we to observe the whole area from upstream to downstream, though…."
"There's no need for such an extensive coverage. It should probably be fine as long you just watch over a fixed area where the path leads through. Besides, we have Yuuki, who can fly and scout regularly."
"True. Seriously, no matter how busy I am, scouting is something I never neglect. I'm quite the hard worker if I do say so myself."

Saying that, Yuuki stood up, puffed up with pride.

"I wonder how she can talk about herself like that."
"As expected of Yuuki, the self-praising witch."
"Rather than self-praising, wouldn't it be better to say self-centered?"
"Doesn't she just want to be praised by Naga-san?"

Starting with Nonoel and Kay, the other witches whispered to each other secretly.

"You there! Do you want to say something?"

Yuuki, whose eyes narrowed, pointed at them with a snap. Kay and the rest averted their eyes in a hurry.

"No no, Yuuki's work is a big deal, and we acknowledge that fact."
"Guess that's an obvious thing."
"Right? Harrigan, don't you think so?"
"Hm? Ah….well….I guess so."
"I can't feel the slightest bit of enthusiasm coming from Hari-nee's words though?!"

As the witches around chuckled, Yuuki sat down on her folding stool with a red face.

“Then, I wonder if we should return back to the topic at hand. Like I said, It’s fine to watch over the place near the path’s intersection with the river. As for who should be in charge of that task, perhaps Nonoel will be suitable.”
“Ah, yes, I’ll do it.”
“After that, Kay will be Nonoel’s guard.”

Moving his face toward her direction, Kay raised up her right hand.

“Um, that’s fine.”
“I wonder whether or not I should appoint 1 more person….”

“Ah, in that case, I, will go.”

Because Ixine lifted up her hand following Kay, Naga decided to entrust the observation to the 3 of them.

“Ixine, bring a horse with you. But hide it in an unnoticeable place, okay? If something unusual happens, ride it back and report to us.”
“Understood.”

Like that, he sent out Nonoel, Kay, and Ixine to observe the river.
Naga was simply choosing the right people for the right job. However, not even he could dream that his simple decision would yield such a great influence over the future of these witches.

プロローグ2

Prologue 2

The new general, Guiscard, who was in the position of governing Kasandora's army, stared at a large map attached on the wall of his office.

It was a map of Kasandora Kingdom's surroundings and borders. Fort Ein was located along the main road stretching from the royal capital. Ahead of the fort, there was a wasteland that unfolded from the other side of the river with a vast black forest drawn on top of the great cliff.

Will the witches end up launching an attack on our side of the river? This was a big problem, which troubled Guiscard.

(Despite our army getting pummelled during the battle, it's hard to consider the witches attacking this side of the river. I can't believe that such a small group would deliberately risk such danger.)

That's right. As long as the witches can continue to live in the black forest peacefully, there shouldn't be a reason for them to willingly attack humanity. That's why Guiscard thought there was no need to fear. However, as the new general, he couldn't neglect his defenses.

Judging from the witches' behaviour thus far, the fact that the witches had initiated an assault on the Kasandora Kingdom's forces at the Schweiz River was, in itself, an extremely unlikely scenario.
Despite that, there wasn't much Guiscard could do.
Even though he was the general of Kasandora's army, as long as there was no orders coming from the group directly under the command of the royal family, he could, at most, mobilize 1500 soldiers on his own.

Not to mention, the nobles felt like withdrawing following the loss and were hesitant about deploying their troops for one reason or another. Were Guiscard to propose raising another army for the extermination of the witches, even those soldiers, whom he was able to deploy, may possibly retire.

With his baton in his right hand, Guiscard lightly tapped a single point on the map, it was the path near the Schweiz River where both sides intersected.

(Should we at least build some sort of defensive facility? Like a fort near the river…..no, we don't have any spare soldiers. In the first place, if the witches learn about that, they will probably come and destroy it. What's more, we might lure them to this side. Even if we were to protect the river more than before, it would be meaningless. Since the river can be crossed from anywhere along it, perhaps, we should set up defensive camps or positions instead of forts…….?)

For that to happen, they would need to invest lots of time and soldiers; nevertheless, the kingdom had no spare budget for that. Guiscard, who was the former treasurer of the army, knew more than anyone else the amount of funds available.

(…..Wouldn't strengthening Fort Ein and increasing the number of guards be a more realistic countermeasure?)

It was a counterplan that was no different from maintaining the current situation, however, even this had its benefits, as Guiscard could avoid provoking the nobles and the soldiers who felt uneasy.

Nonetheless, this plan wasn't that simple.

Following the great defeat they had suffered, soldiers continued to retire from active duty one after another. The nobles, officers, and soldiers became frightened, and even a disturbance broke out inside the group under the direct supervision of the royal family.
Just punishing the soldiers and dispatching them to the river would be a big mistake.
For the time being, Guiscard managed to send in Raibach's troop, whose fate was of little importance to him. Still, the numbers in Raibach's troop wasn't sufficient to set up a defensive position along the river.

(Assuming that guy's troop continues to carry out their duty without any problems, those cowardly noble officers and their men should also gain enough courage to approach the river, but…)

Because it didn't seem like the witches would immediately cross the river and assault them, for now, Guiscard could only bear with that much.
For him, there was something of bigger concern.
They had to replenish those soldiers who had promptly resigned with new ones.
Besides the fact that a whole battalion was crushed, resigning soldiers continued to appear.
With the kingdom's military force cut almost in half right now, unless they resolved the problem of their numbers, no further invasion could be considered.
However, if another battle against the witches is expected to take place in the near future, Guiscard might not be able to recruit fresh soldiers unless he increases their salary.

As the former treasurer, the budget constraints were the greatest type of headache for him.

"Damn."

Clicking his tongue sternly, Guiscard threw the baton against the map.
No matter how hard he pondered, no good ideas came to him. He could only come back to the conclusion that they were cornered.

"General."

The voice of his adjutant, Ligaya, emerged from the doorway.
Picking up the baton from the floor in a hurry, Guiscard quickly returned to his seat and answered.

"Enter."
"I apologize for the interruption."

The tall Ligaya, whose body was wrapped in a strong bitter tea colored military suit, entered inside.
Ligaya was a cool and collected man who would rarely show his emotions. Nevertheless, today, his footsteps were noisier and faster paced. Guiscard, who understood that something had happened, straightened himself unconsciously.

"Could it be that the witches attacked?"
"No, they haven't."

At his reply, Guiscard breathed out a sigh of relief. Then he relaxed himself to keep up appearances in front of the adjutant.

"Then, what's the matter?"
"For some reason, it appears that various neighboring countries are arming themselves with weapons and army provisions."
"What on….earth?"

Guiscard thought about the meaning behind Rigaya's new report.

"Those guys, could it be that they intend to assault our country?"
"……That's unlikely to happen. After all, we are under the custody of Cardinal Aiba."
"I wonder about that."

(To begin with, that Cardinal Aiba is an eyesore for our country, but…)

The other day too, Aiba went through the trouble of paying a visit to the royal capital in order to offer his congratulations to Guiscard on his assumption of the office. However, putting that aside, Aiba expressed his sarcasm toward the major loss, which Kasandora suffered at the river on his way back.

If the Kasandora Kingdom were to just accept their defeat and remain idle, they might lose favor with Aiba. If that happened, then a major deterrence would be removed and other countries may move to wipe Kasandora right off the map.

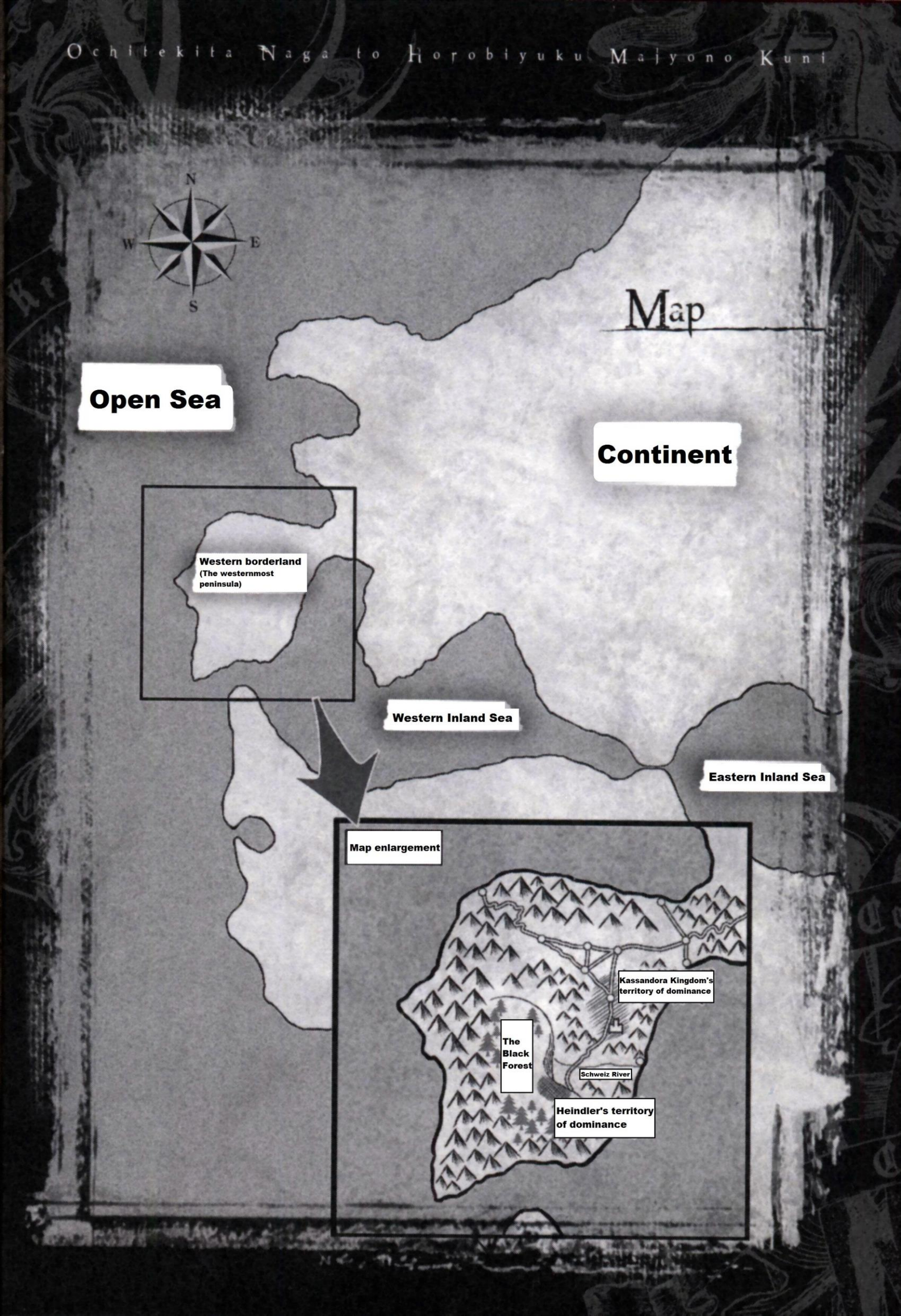
(Truly, my head is killing me. If only I didn't take up the position as general….)

Guiscard desperately tried to endure the urge to hold his head between his hands.

(That's right, I've got to do it despite all this. In order to make my wish come true, I will obtain the throne.)

"For the time being…..... for the time being, we will strengthen the defenses of Fort Ein and assign Maglev to command it. Rigaya, please make the estimations for the necessary materials."
"Understood."

Exactly at that time, Naga and the witches began to move as they set their eyes on Fort Ein, while watching vigilantly for an opportunity to prey upon it. Nonetheless, not anticipating that that would happen, Guiscard could do nothing but throw his hands up in despair, even if he had known beforehand.
If this only concerned the witches and Naga and Kasandora Kingdom, the witches would already be on the side of victory.


N
W
E
S
Map
Open Sea
Continent
Western borderland
(The westernmost peninsula)
Western Inland Sea
Eastern Inland Sea
Map enlargement
Kassandora Kingdom's territory of dominance
The Black Forest
Schweiz River
Heindler's territory of dominance

ケイの魔法

身体を金属のように硬質化する（実際、硬化したケイの身体は銀色の鈍い光沢を放つ）。
肉弾戦に優れるほか、矢も剣も通さない鉄壁の防御を誇る。
その硬度は、ケイの魔力の練り上げによって変わるようである。

第1章

同盟締結

Chapter 1– The Conclusion of the Alliance

1

The head of Sraymeyer household, Vita, lived in a fort inside the black forest.
Ais and Lela travelled there with the intention of visiting her.
The path which they both walked inside the forest was well maintained, and it wasn't that hard to move on it.
The two of them wore their usual thin clothes.
Ais guessed that meeting Vita would be a difficult task by itself, however, as soon as they stepped into Sraymeyer's territory, one of their members, Elysione, appeared.
Both of them were previously acquainted so, once Ais told her the reason that they'd come, Elysione promptly answered to their request as predicted. Still, there was one thing that took them by surprise.
"That's because Mother said that you would be contacting us soon. Like that, she's been waiting there."

Or something like that?

Ais and Lela looked at each other's face unconsciously.

"So she anticipated we would come talk to her because we had won the battle against Kasandora's ar-my….?"

As Lela whispered, Ais nodded as if saying 'I see'.

"Right now, Mother is at the 2nd fort. I was told to bring you there, were you to come. I'll guide you, so you may follow me."

Saying so, Elysione turned aside adroitly and walked into the dark forest.

Ais and Lela looked at each other's face once more.

"Vita-san who's known to be a sourpuss is being way too upfront. I've got a bad feeling about this."
"Ais, I think it's better not to…."

Elysione stopped and turned around, staring at Ais.

"I can hear you, Ais."
"Yes? About what?"
"This girl…"

Elysione glared at her for a while, then finally sighed and loosened her expression.

“Well, I guess it’s fine. Even I can’t deny that aspect about Mother. Rather, I’d agree with you.”

Speaking her mind, Elysione looked around hurriedly.

“But don’t tell that to Mother.”

Ais cracked a smile and replied.

“Obviously, I won’t, Elysione. After all, I don’t want both of us to be killed.”
“…..Follow me.”

Turning around once more, she continued to walk. Ais and Lela followed her.

2

Elysione led them and reached one of Sraymeyer’s forts, Ais and Lela were then guided into Vita’s residence, the inside of which, made them look about curiously.
Even if it was the residence of a clan, it was a basic construction similar to a hut with erected pillars.
Elysione stood in the doorway and announced:

“Mother, I’ve brought with me Harrigan-dono’s messengers, just as you told me.”

As she called out loudly, a languid voice responded.

“Who are the messengers?”
“It’s Ais and Lela.”

“Fufun. To think that Harrigan would send those two, it seems like she’s serious this time. Fine, you may enter.”

Elysione opened the door and urged them both to enter.

“Forgive me for interrupting, Vita-san.”
“Excuse me for distur-bing you.”

Ais and Lela stepped inside the building.
What they saw was a spacious living room. The room had a transparent glass ceiling and wooden walls. It was no different from the residence of Ais and the rest.
The windows in the room were closed with wooden shutters.
From the inside, two candles were burning on candle stands, however, their flame was weak, making the room dimly lit.

Vita was laying on her side on a thick mattress on top of a raised step inside the room.
Besides her, there was one more witch who acted as her lap pillow.

“I apologize for neglecting to remain in contact, Vita-san.”

As they both bowed down in front of her, Vita suddenly sat up.

“Ahh, long time no see.”

Vita, who was wearing a cute outfit that matched her small body, beckoned Ais and Lela to come closer.

Once they did so, Vita directed her sight toward the witch
next to her.

“Dora, bring those two folding stools.”
“Yes, Mother.”

The girl who stood up wore a long dress with multiple notches.
She wasn’t as tall as Elysione, however, her body lines were refined and her curves looked much clearer than Elysione’s. Unlike her, Elysione wore a long, loose mantle, which made it harder to grasp her body lines.
The girl called Dora lined up the stools on the floor.

“Sit.”
“Thank you very much.”
“Ais, you better sit gently.”
“Yes?”
“Otherwise, the stool will break if you sit violently.”

Snap – Ais’ face became stiff.

“No no, I, there’s no way that I’m that heavy.”
“Is that so? Then I guess it’s fine.”

(As always, she’s one rude person)

Hiding this thought inside her heart, Ais carefully sat.

As soon as Lela did the same, Dora and Elysione secured their places on either side of Vita.
Vita, who sat cross-legged on the thick mattress, fixed her eyes on Ais.
It was a sharp look that didn’t suit her child-like face and her small body.

“Before I ask you about the purpose of your arrival…. answer me this one question, Ais. Is it true that there’s a man in your group?”

Being questioned by Vita, Ais smiled positively and replied.

“There’s a single man by our side, but I’m not sure whether it’s accurate to describe him as a human guy.”

Vita narrowed her eyes and directed them at Ais. A dangerous light was dwelling inside them.

“What? What do you mean by saying so? I don’t much like people that express themselves in riddles.”
“No, that’s not a riddle, Vita-san.”
“Then what?”
“Naga-san, he’s……”

As Ais was about to speak, Vita interrupted.

“What about the Dragon King?”

“It’s that person’s name.”
“Dragon King? Isn’t it quite a proud name?”

Ais continued to speak while ignoring Vita’s banter.

“In the end, is Naga-san a human guy or not? It’s still not clear for us…. This is what I mean.”

Vita slightly tilted her head.

“I don’t get it. If he’s not a human guy, then what are you saying he is?”
“Perhaps… he might be the Dragon King just like his name implies.”

Once Ais said so with a prim look, Vita opened widely her eyes.

“It could be as well…. that he’s a messenger sent by the Dragon King.”
“Are you, sane…?”

Ais suddenly smiled.

“It may be that I’m not. To think that we could even consider facing Kasandora’s army of 2000 with barely 20 people while hoping that we could win…”

That’s it! – Vita clapped her hands together.

“In other words, that man, named Naga, was the one who guided you through the previous battle?”
“Yes, I think it’s fine to have you think that way.”

Vita leaned slightly forward and said.

“Why is someone like him at your place? How did you repel Kasandora’s army that consisted of 2000 soldiers? Let me hear in detail.”
“Yes, that would be—-”

3

Ais briefly explained the whole story from when Naga appeared till the present to Vita. Listening to her, Vita made a difficult face while folding up her arms, but,

“….And well, this is how it went.”
As soon as Vita finished listening to Ais’ explanation, she slightly groaned and looked fixedly at her.

“Talking about things like a man suddenly falling from the sky…. I know you’re not the type of girl who would joke or say things on a whim, but it’s a story that is hard for me to believe.”
“I guess so. Not even we would have thought about winning against an army consisting of 2000 soldiers.”

“Right? Even so, this style of fighting is strange for both humans and witches. But….hm?”

Vita, who tilted her head while folding up her arms, suddenly raised her head.

“And what’s the reason for you visiting our place on this occasion…?”
“Yes, that’s right. We came here as Naga-san’s messengers.”
“Hou hou, interesting. That Naga person, what does he want to convey to us?”
“Then, I shall pass on Naga-san’s words.”

After she coughed at once deliberately, Ais corrected her sitting posture.

“In order to create a new world where both the witches and the humans can live in peace and harmony with each other, won’t you join us in fighting together?’ In other words, joining together with Harrigan’s Clan.”

“Wha..?”

Vita became speechless.
That’s because the content of Naga’s words was far from rational.

(Not for defending the black forest nor driving away the human army, he wants me to join him in……creating a new world? That man, is he sane?)

“Do you think these are nonsensical words coming from a lunatic? Or perhaps just a random dream of a man who came from another dimension and possesses no knowledge regarding this world?”

At this question, Vita lifted up her head and gazed at Ais in front of her. As she did so, their eyes met.

“…..Well, is this a joke, a dream, or maybe a realistic idea? I want to meet this man.”

Ais’ expression broke out into a smile.

“Yes, we too thought about having you meet and discuss things with Naga-san.”
“What’s the date for that?”
“Since it’s best to do it as soon as possible, how about tomorrow?”
“I don’t mind. And the place will be?”
“We shall visit you here.”
“Is that so? Then, tomorrow… that’s right, how about at noon?”
“Fine, then we would be happy to.”
“Yeah, I’ll be waiting for you.”

“Speaking of which” – Vita lowered her face and gazed toward Lela who sat next to Ais.

“Haven’t you been quite silent for a while, Lela?”
“That’s because I’m not that good in dealing with conversations.”
“Kukuku, is that so? Then, will you answer me this one question? How do you see that guy named Naga? Does he look like the Dragon King to you?”
“Not sure whether or not he’s the Dragon King, bu-t, at least I believe he isn’t someone from this world.”
“Fumu. I want to give that person some thorough questioni…no, I remember you mentioned about him losing his memories.”
“Y-es. But once he regains them, we plan to question him thoroughly about the world he came fro-m.”

Kukuku – Vita laughed pleasantly.

“It would be nice to see that man regain his memory, Lela.”
“Ye-s.”

“Excellent. Then, we will be waiting here for you tomorrow at noon, Ais.”
“We are looking forward to it.”

Soon after Ais bowed down, the interview concluded.
4

Leaving Vita’s place, Ais and Lela were on the way back to their fort.
Walking with their fast pace along a lane inside the thick forest, Ais called out to Lela.

“It went smoother than we had expected.”
“Tru-e. It seems that Vita-san took a liking to Naga-sa-n. What’s more, that woman is a witch who can understand the tru-th. Rather, among all the witches, she’s the one who possesses an eye to look towards the futu-re.”
“That’s right. She’s an ill-tempered, bigoted, and sarcastic person, but her ability to think and judge is pretty firm. In addition to that, the way she thinks is flexible.”
“Since we ain’t in the presence of that person, you can talk about what you want to your heart’s content, right Ai-s?”
“Of course you dummy. Isn’t it obvious to speak boldly about her when she isn’t around? Only complete fools would express what they think in front of the real person.”

Lela stared fixedly at Ais.

(It might be a sound argument, still…)

“But, I’m glad. I was worried about our encounter with Vita-san.”
“After all, we didn’t know what would have happene-d.”
“I worry that the talk between Vita-san and Naga-san won’t progress smoothly.”
“Why do you think s-o?”
“It feels like something is going to happen.”
“I se-e.”
“Providing Vita-san cooperates with us, we may be able to bring down Fort Ein.”

“I wonder about th-at. Won’t she get mad if Naga-san tells her about such a pipe drea-m?”
“Don’t fret. Surely, it should be okay.”
“You’re quite positive, aren’t yo-u?”

Fufu – At Lela’s retort, Ais laughed once she stopped walking and turned around.

“I have the feeling that something will happen. Look, til now, haven’t you felt at a loss, not knowing when things will start or end? But now, our vision is clear and our path has been revealed to us. Despite the other side looking dim, we can still see the future. This is how I feel.”

(It’s just as she says, bu-t….there’s no doubt about that small light of hope appearing for us, who were going down the path of destructio-n. Could it b-e….)

Lela recalled Naga's words. About one victory being only the beginning of the next one, and about the war continuing from now on.
There may be a future of endless battles waiting ahead of the witches.
For the sake of the witches' future, there might be those who will fight and fall.

(I wonder if everyone is aware of th-at)

Is what Lela felt a little anxious about.

When hope for the future is in sight, everyone will want to fight for it. Among the members of the Heindler Clan, who had been stagnant for a long time, a new, better life was born. Everyone's faces were shining with newfound hope.

(This is certainly a sign of something good….I gue-ss. If this is a dream, then perhaps it would be nice for it to rema-in.)

Lela wanted to continue this dream, even if it was only for a short while.

(That's because, I can sense a hope from watching this dre-am. For the time being, should I thank Naga-san for letting us see th-is drea-m?)

"Ara, isn't it rare for Lela to be in good mood?"
"Eh? You think s-o?"
"That's right. It's not common to see you with such a happy face."

Lela didn't plan to change her expression, but Ais, who had sharp eyes, wouldn't let that moment slip away. If she says so, then it's certainly like that.

"Ais."
"What?"
"What do you think about Naga-sa-n?"
"Eh? What are you asking all of a sudden? T-There's no way for me to answer that straight away."

Seeing how she flapped her hands with a blushing face, Lela again gazed fixedly at Ais.

"Uhm….that's not what I mean. I wanted to ask whether you consider that person as the Dragon King or the messenger of the Dragon King, bu-t….."

"Ahhh, t-that's right. Umm……"

Ais, who stared a bit into space finally came back to herself and smiled.

"I don't know."
"I see."
"But, isn't it fine anyway?"

“I wonder if it’s really s-o.”
“That’s because whether or not that person is the Dragon King or the Dragon King’s messenger, the truth about him giving us a hope remains. Therefore, I have decided to follow that person.”
“I…..guess you’re righ-t.”

(Indeed, Ais is a strong girl.)

In this case, Lela didn’t mean Ais’ body, but her spirit.
The reason for that wasn’t merely because of Ais acting as a big sister or because of her terrific fighting strength resulting from the enhancement of her body, but her ability to brace everyone mentally. If Harrigan and Ais say they will follow Naga, then nobody among the members will oppose it.

(That’s right, even I…)

“Lela too is probably thinking that way?”

Since Ais said so while looking into her face, Lela unintentionally averted her eyes.
Lela who had difficulty with being honest then muttered:
“It’s just because I’m interested in that per-son.”

Is what she replied with.

“If that’s the case, we ought to at least follow Naga-san til he recovers his memory, right?”
“Tr-ue.”

Ais smiled sweetly and broadly.

“Let’s do our best.”
“Y,Yeah.”
“Well then, let’s return back quickly and arrange an interview for Naga-san and Vita-san.”

5

Being accompanied by Harrigan and Ais, Naga rode his horse through the black forest toward the fort in which Vita was awaiting them.

Naga was thankful that, since they had extra time today, no one had asked him to run. Even though he was riding on a horse, Naga was reluctant to dash with all its might inside the dim forest and along an unclear path.
Apart from the 2 previously mentioned witches, Lela and one more witch, named Langeais, who was previously entrusted with the 2nd fort, tagged along with them.
The four of them went on foot. However, even their walking speed was rather fast, therefore, not having to deliberately slow his horse down was a great relief for him.

Langeais, whom he met for the first time, seemed to be older than Yuuki and Lela, but a bit younger than Ais.
She had black hair, which was rare for the witches, and a cute face. Furthermore she seemed to be an emotionless and unsociable witch. For some reason, she also gave the impression that she was a foreign person.

(Speaking of which, she seems a bit melancholic. I wonder if it's because of her black hair.)

While thinking so, Naga recalled the time when he greeted her.

{Are you Naga? My name is Langeais. Please treat me well from now on.}

She answered simply, and no matter what, would show almost no reaction afterwards, even if Naga was to start talking to her.

"This girl, could it be that she dislikes me?"

Naga asked Ais secretly, she replied.

"I don't think that's the case. Langeais, has been always like that. It would be fine to say she doesn't hold any interest toward others?"

"Fuun."

Why did they invite such a witch to participate in the discussion with Vita? – Despite these thoughts, Naga believed that Harrigan had her own ideas about that. However, since he wasn't in the position where he could inquire excessively about her household's matters, Naga decided not to ask any further.

(Anyway, having an interview with the witch who controls the household of Sraymeyer is our top priority. I'd rather have Langeais take an interest and somehow cooperate with us, but…)

Before the interview started, Naga had Harrigan tell him various things about Vita.
While managing the horse reins, he asked Harrigan to once again describe Vita.

6

According to Harrigan…

"She's a biased, gaudy, haughty, uncooperative, self-righteous, and spiteful person who acts according to her own whims. She's also much older than me."
"She has no good points at all?"

As Naga retorted, Harrigan nodded seriously.

“Umu, she doesn’t possess any.”
“You’re not denying this?”
“That’s because I’m not very fond of Vita, you see?”
“She seems like a person that’s hard to please. Doesn’t it seem like it’ll be very difficult to convince her….?”
“Well, I wonder about that.”
“What do you mean?”
“Since she’s an eccentric person, maybe she will get along with an oddball like you.”
“Please stop that. I don’t think I’m that strange.”
“I’d say that being able to calmly respond to being called an oddball is what’s strange about you.”
“*hmmm*…is that so?”
“Judging from Ais’ talk with her, it appears that Vita has taken an interest in you, so you shouldn’t be driven away. The rest will be down to luck.”
“….I guess so. Speaking of which, what type of ability does Vita possess?”
“If I were to describe that woman’s magic with few words, perhaps that would be weight control….?”
“Weight control?”

For instance….- Harrigan gave an example to Naga who seemed confused and doubtful.

“If you mention her age or something similar like that, you will most likely worsen her mood.”
“Oi, it’s indeed an unpleasant example. By the way, I’m not that thick headed.”
“That’s why it was just an illustration. Listen to me before you talk back.”
“Y….yeah.”
“Before you realize it, your weight will double or triple, and you won’t be able to move your body.”
“Is that true?”
“It is. Back when I was small, I’d abuse and make the children of Sraymeyer’s household cry or something along those lines. With that ability of hers, she would hold me down by sealing off my movements and slap my ass…. ah….”
“Hohou.”

Naga grinned.

“Weren’t you quite a naughty kid back then?”

Harrigan’s hair rose into the air and took the form of a big mallet.

“Don’t you think it’s in both of our best interests to forget what I said just now?”
“G, Got it. I’ll forget about it thoroughly. I heard nothing in the first place.”
“Then, it’s fine.”

Once Harrigan’s hair relaxed, Naga exhaled a sigh of relief.

“Besides, I’m more interest in that weight control, you see. Will it work on anyone? Or on multiple enemies? Can it be applied everywhere?”
“Information about how strong one’s magic is, or its range and conditions of use, are all undisclosed, especially for those from other families. Therefore, I too, am not knowledgeable about her magic.”
“I see. So it’s about weight? Weight… weight, indeed.”

7

Naga made such a statement, however, at that time, he had a hunch it could be used in different ways. A detailed plan didn’t cross his mind, but Naga had the feeling it could be applied for another purpose.

(This is another reason that I have to be careful about bringing her to our side.)

As he was deep in thought, they had neared their destination before he realized it.

“Naga, we’ve arrived. The fort of Sraymeyer’s clan lies in front of us.”

As soon as Naga lifted his head, he understood the forest in front of him had ended.

(Well then, I wonder what kind of woman this witch Vita is.)

Naga trembled with excitement, feeling that this interview will influence their future.

8

“I see, so you’re the man who holds the name of the Dragon King in jest? Indeed, you seem to look odd.”

Immediately after facing each other inside the residential building of the fort, Vita uttered those words without letting them finish their greetings.
The girl, named Vita, sat on a folding stool on a raised step. Naga and the rest who were in front of her on the lower floor were given a row of folding stools.

(You as well. Should I say you are strange, or perhaps strange-looking? Are you supposed to be older than Harrigan with that childish body?)

Despite thinking so, Naga felt it was better not to touch that topic and instead asked.

“Do I really look that odd?”

He held himself back from being insulting, however the witches to the sides of Vita became agitated.

“You, how dare you speak to Mother with that tone!”
“Did that lowly human just say something that was supposed to ridicule Mother?”

After that, Vita quickly lifted up her hand and held back her daughters.

“Stop yapping so noisily. Are you both dogs? Be silent.”
“M, My apologies, Mother.”
“Well then, shall we introduce ourselves?”

As Vita stood and spoke, Naga got up from his stool.
She threw her chest out as if projecting her flat chest.

“My name is Vita Solskjaer Sraymeyer. I’m the head of Sraymeyer’s household”
“I’m…. ah, I’m currently called Naga.”
“What’s with that ‘currently’?”
“Forgive me. I think you’ve already heard about me, but I’ve lost my memories from before I fell into this world. The only thing I remember is my own name.”
“And that would the one….. called Naga?”

Fufun – As she laughed through her nose and sat, Naga and the rest reseated themselves as well.

“Then, Naga, it appears that the Heindler Household has gained victory over 2000 soldiers from Kasandora’s army thanks to your strategy, but is that true?”
“Saying that it was thanks to my strategy isn’t quite correct.”
“Hou? Then how did you win against their forces?”
“That’s because Harrigan and the rest followed my plan, you see.”

(Is he trying to emphasize his own achievement? Is he a confident person? Or perhaps just a self-conceited fool?)

is what Vita thought, however, she wouldn’t reveal that.

“Harrigan, aren’t you blessed with excellent daughters?”

What Vita uttered seemed to be sarcastic words toward Harrigan, but nevertheless, Harrigan couldn’t tell if they were sarcastic or not from her tone. The girls who sat next to Vita’s side made a dissatisfied expression.

“Then, Dragon King, what’s your business with us? I hope you didn’t come just to boast about your victory. What kind of talk do you wish to have with us?”
“Well, it’s true that I want to boast about myself some, but let’s leave that aside.”

Naga fixed his gaze on Vita as she came to grips with the man in front of her.

Vita noticed a strong will burned in his eyes. No element of anxiety, fear, or hesitation could be felt from them.

(This guy, despite being a human, doesn't fear witches? What's more, he's surrounded by this many. No matter how well he's acquainted with Harrigan and the rest, for him to be this bold….. Could this guy really be from another world…?)

Ignoring her unrestrained and possibly rather rude gaze, Naga spoke powerfully.

"So you said you're Vita, right? The head of Sraymeyer's household."
"True."
"Won't you join together with us in making a new world where both the witches and humans can coexist, Vita-san?"

Fufun – Vita again laughed under her nose.

"I heard about it from Ais, who requested an audience with me the other day, but it's quite an ambitious ideal of yours. No, rather than saying 'ambitious', shouldn't I say 'reckless'? It would be magnificent for such a world to exist, still, isn't it just an impractical theory you came up with while sitting around? Just how on earth do you plan to carry out such a grand plan? Do you think it'll happen once you've won a single war? If so, you're just a simpleton."

Listening to Vita's tirade, Naga became both astonished and pleased at the same time. That's because he once again understood the reason why people said Vita had an eye for predicting the future.

"That's right, it's just like you say. My aim isn't just a half-hearted plan that will finish with a few victories, and I know that."

At Naga's reply, Vita became surprised.
(Is he trying to come up with an explanation after hearing what I just said?!)

"Then, what type of plan did you come up with for realizing this ideal of yours?"
"First, we are going to establish a country of witches in which I'm going to implement my ideals."

Vita started to say something as she moved her lips; nevertheless, she made up her mind and didn't say anything, then urged Naga to continue speaking while folding her hands.

"Once we establish the country and gain a proper populace, the extent of its territory will continue to increase. Obviously, this won't be simple. We will have to fight many great battles. However, that's a trivial matter as long as we are victorious. The real problem lies in increasing the population and the size of the territory. The witches will be the ones to control the populace, and our success will depend on whether or not they can govern them skillfully."

(As long as we are victorious…. he says?)

Vita stared at Naga dumbfounded.

(The way he's talking, it feels as though victory is something natural for him. Is this guy sane?)

Because even Vita looked surprised and bewildered, the other witches looked at Naga with ridicule, or to be more accurate – scornful eyes, rather than being amazed.
The only ones who thought what Naga said were obvious or reasonable, were the witches from Harrigan's party.

(No, in the first place it's strange for people to think that what he's saying is obvious or easily achievable… Could it be that Harrigan and the rest were swept up in his grand ambition? Or maybe, they are all suffering from a fever?)

"Still, there's no other option than to try and see how it will work. After all, it's a plan of trial and error. However, since the witches have no experience governing a structure as big as a country, we will need human advisors at all costs, I think. As soon as we gain control over a human country, we should employ its officials and perhaps—-"
"No no, wait a moment."

Unable to endure, Vita interrupted.

"What's the matter?"
"Rather than saying 'What's the matter?', shouldn't you be saying 'What should we do?'……."

Vita closed her eyes rubbed her forehead with in circular motion using her thumb.

"Sorry for cutting you off, but there are few things I want to ask. Would you mind if I do so, Dragon King?"
"Fine. Ask me however much you want."

Opening her eyes wide, she gazed at Naga and leaned in a bit.

"You talk about establishing a country of witches, but how do you plan to do so?"
"That's easy. Just announcing that we have 'established' one is plenty."
"Hu….huh?"
"It's not like there's a special requirement to make one. I think it's fine to advance towards the human lands and declare that the witches have banded together to make a new world."
"…..How will I benefit from that?"
"For the time being, there won't be any benefit."
"No benefit, you say…"

Vita made a miserable face.

“I think being able to continue to live in the future is a good enough reason.”
“Still, if we declare our intention to establish a new country, the humans will most likely become more cautious.”
“Well, it might be so. However, that too is a trivial matter.”
“T-Trivial matter….”

(Just what’s going on inside this guy’s head?)

As one would expect, Vita was troubled and confused and was unable to consider his thoughts as logical.

“Anyway, it’s inevitable that we will need to capture the humans’ forts one by one. Even if we don’t announce our intentions to form a new country after we attack, they will still become more alert and cautious.”
“That may be true…. nonetheless…”
“What’s more, if you increase your territory and your dominion, rather than being cautious, every human country will probably band together against us.”
“And if we continue to win?”

“It can’t be said for certain that we can continue to win, but assuming we strive to win with everyone’s strength, we’ll probably be able to cut our way through sooner or later.”

(Is he a realist with high calculating skills, or an idealist who’s unaware of the current state? Perhaps, he’s just a foolish optimist? The more I listen to him, the less I can understand.)

“What’s the matter? Isn’t that grimace spoiling your lovely face?”
“Mu…. looks like you’ve got quite a discerning eye there.”

(Mother?)
(Lovely?)
(That guy, as I expected, he has a few screws loose, doesn’t he?)

Once Vita stared at her witches, who whispered things like that to each other, the place immediately turned silent.

“Do you have any other questions, Vita-san?”
“A, ah, right.”

Pulling herself together, Vita again faced Naga.

“It’s about increasing the territory and the number of people inside the established country. Once the declaration is made, do you plan to inhabit the forest by bringing the humans? Or perhaps, by taking them as prisoners of wars?”
“Let’s see, let’s see.”

Naga tilted his head from side to side in contemplation.

“Even if we are to make a country here inside the forest, it won’t be possible for us to expand it. Isn’t there a habitable place for the humans in the steep mountain district behind us?”
“You’ve got a point. Then, where would you suggest we make it?”
“I wonder if we should choose an area on the border of the Kasandora Kingdom.”
“W-What?!”

As one would expect, not even Vita could avoid being taken aback. The girls who sat next to her also had speechless and stunned faces.

“Why are you that surprised? After all, we are supposed to create a new world for both sides. Unless we go to the human world and defeat them there, the goal will be far from reach. First, we need to get ahold of an area along the border, form it into a country, raise the population, and establish a good administration.”
“G….Good administration, you say?”
“Right. After we do so, we will create publicity by telling the humans to spread a rumor about this country being a place where both humans and the witches can live in harmony.”
“Will that change anything?”
“In the future, it will be easier for us to gain control over other countries when conquering them. Even if they are occupied by our witch country, there’s no reason for their citizens to be slaughtered or enslaved. Rather, if we have everyone think that they can live more peacefully than before, capturing a castle will be an easy thing. There might even be cities that will open their gates for us. Not to mention, it will be easier for us to rule as an occupying power. Aren’t there nothing but benefits?”

Vita’s body was flooded with astonishment and felt numb.

(T-This guy, could it be that he’s an absurd realist while being a ridiculous idealist at the same time?)

“To be more accurate….What I mean to say is it’s hard for me to complain about this and that since I’m not yet too knowledgeable about how the governing structure works in this world. But, assuming it’s natural to impose lighter taxes on citizens, perhaps we should start to work on abolishment of checking stations, stopping the collection of tolls, arranging main roads and extending their width, or suspending bridges over rivers.”

(There’s no doubt. This guy can keep his feet on the ground, even while looking into the distant future. He’s a fearsome realist. At least, there should be nobody in this world who can come up with such reasoning. Even those small, influential feudal lords should, at least, be able to figure out that paving roads and erecting bridges will make it easier for them to attack, but at the same time leaves them open to invasion.)

As she suddenly lifted up her face, her eyes met with those of Harrigan.

(What do you think? Isn't he an interesting fellow?)

Vita felt as if Harrigan's eyes were telling her so.

(Fun, he's indeed a compelling man. However, just because he's compelling, it doesn't mean I'll expose my daughters to danger.)

Both Harrigan and Vita exchanged glances.

"By the way, Dragon King, it appears you plan to take over the Kasandora Kingdom and establish a country there, but, how do you plan to do so? There are just 20-30 people in Harrigan's household, and the same goes for my family. Provided we temporarily lent you a hand, you'd be able to mobilize at most 40-50 people, right? How do you intend to gain control over the Kingdom?"

"Regarding that, we are going to do it using straightforward methods. In other words, by capturing castles one by one. In this world, castles and cities seem to bear the same meaning. If I were to say if it will be fast, it will be fast. Will it be difficult? It will be difficult. Well, still, it depends on how quick we progress."
"That's easy for you to say. There are more than a thousand guards and probably many thousands of other citizens who can arm themselves to protect each city. How are the 50 people we have supposed to capture it?"
"Perhaps it would be impossible under normal circumstances, but, if it's us, especially you, then it should be feasible. That's because you're witches who possess special abilities."
"Then, then how?"
"Since it's difficult for us to bring down a city all of sudden, I think we should first practice on Fort Ein."

"Saying that this and that is simple. Whenever I hear your talking, I get the feeling there's nothing that you think is impossible."
"Right?"
"It was supposed to be sarcastic!"

Vita retorted, then pulled herself together and continued to speak.

"Indeed, rather than bringing down a city, it might be easier for us to capture a fort. Still, with 40-50 of us, I think the task is next to impossible."
"I'm aware it won't be easy, but I don't consider it to be that hard."

Despite having just recovered from her surprise, Vita couldn't help but to feel increasingly astonished.

"Not hard?! You sure are confident."
"However, there's a 'but'. In order to do so, I need your cooperation."
"Hohou? So are you saying it's only doable with our power?"

As Vita questioned without replying to him, Naga gave a seemingly unrelated question.

“Vita-san, it’s true that you can control weight using your magic, correct?”
“Ah? Ahh, so you heard about it from Harrigan? True, you can consider it that way.”
“That ability of yours, won’t you show it to me? While we are at it, how about you try it out on me?”
“Oi, Naga, don’t do anything reckless.”

As Harrigan tried to stop him,

“Silence, you titty monster.”
“I-I’m not a titty monster, you flat, little girl.”

(Uwaa, it’s started～)

Ais and Lela made a sour face.

(I was wondering if it would be fine, since Ane-sama has been quite obedient today, but…)
(Well, I guess she has been enduring pretty we-ll)

Good grief – The witches next to Vita shook their head and sighed in agreement.

“Isn’t your overweight chest the reason you stagger when walking?”
“Even if you were to be unable to control weight, your body seems small and light enough to float, doesn’t it? That’s because your lack of chest makes your body light.”
“Harrigan, you rascal, it appears you’ve become quite big-mouthed toward me. Even though I used to be in charge of changing your diapers whenever you would piss your pants.”

As soon as Naga directed his sight toward Harrigan, whose face turned red, she snapped and pointed at Vita.

“That was back when I was still a baby!”
“Don’t you understand? This is the difference between you and me.”

Don!

The room swayed and its construction groaned.

“Nuoooh.”

Before Naga realized it, he was lying on the floor.

9

“W….What’s happening……?”

Naga, who tumbled to the floor, tried to lift himself up by putting his strength into his limbs, nevertheless, his body didn't move as he wished.

"W….What's the meaning of this….oh, that's right, is this your magic?"

Once he desperately turned his head around and checked the surroundings, everyone from the Harrigan and Sraymeyer's households were crawling on the floor.
The only one to be standing was Vita herself.

"True. This is my magic. People call it 'Song of Gravity'. How's that? You probably can't move."
"I…I cannot move."
"Mother, please….keep your power… down."

One of Sraymeyer's witches said it as if being in pain.

(Speaking of which….why is she repressing her own members…hey, that's right!)

"Oi….Vita-san….."
"Hou? You're still able to talk? Certainly, you're a big deal. Then, what do you want to know, Dragon King?"
"Y….Your power isn't working just on a specific person…..but equally on everyone within its range…..right? You cannot choose….your target….on your own…right?"
"Hohou, so you were able to figure it out with a single look?"

(Despite him probably being in agony, he's got a good discerning eye)

"It's just as you say, but,"

Her power which suppressed Naga suddenly loosened up….or rather, wouldn't it be more accurate to say his body became lighter?

(Did my body get lighter? It may be that it just returned back to its normal weight, but…)
Those who regained their movements squirmed with their body while trying to lift themselves up.
Suddenly, Vita jumped up lightly. Dancing high in the sky with no resistance, she landed calmly and gently in front of Naga.

"I can do things like this too, but well,"

Once she said so, Vita placed her hand on his head.

"Guhaaa."

Naga gasped as if all the air in his lungs had been shot out and lay on his belly on the floor. His limbs wouldn't move even if he tried, and his organs felt oppressed, like they were being squashed.

(This is….There's no way for my muscles…to move. As one would expect, it's the result of my body turning heavier.)

Naga recalled the miserable appearance of a frog squashed on a roadside that he had once witnessed.

(Hey, it isn't time for remembering that…..if you have time for that……think of something more useful….!)[talking to himself]

"Gueeh."

Not being able to endure, Naga leaked such a groan.

"How about that? I can also aim for specific people?"

With the weight of his body alleviating a bit, Naga somehow managed to raise up his head and looked around him. The other witches were lifting their bodies and standing up with confidence.

His eyes met with Harrigan who seemed to be worried about him.
Sorry – She put up her right hand and bowed down as if saying so.

"…No wait. Why are you placing your hand on my head? Could it be that you need to touch your target in order to mark it with your power?"
"Uhahahaha."

Vita suddenly burst out in laughter.

Withdrawing her hand, she turned on her heels while laughing.

(….I can move! Speaking of which, my body returned to its original weight. Then, it means I was right.)

Naga raised his head and stared at her back.
Vita, who returned to her stool, turned her expression back to a serious one after she stopped laughing.
"You've caught my eye, Dragon King-dono. Hey, don't just lie there, stand up."
"Y…Yeah"

Naga lifted his body, which had returned to its original weight.

“Hm? Harrigan, are you able to stand up with that heavy pair of breasts? If so, wouldn’t it be fine for me to caress and lighten that unreasonably large chest for you?”
“It would be too much of a favor!”

Harrigan had been watching attentively and anxiously, the exchange between Naga and Vita, before she sprang up.

“Despite that, Harrigan, you came to me in order to ask for a favor, didn’t you? Not to mention, I’m your great benefactor, right? Then shouldn’t you be more prudent in your actions? Hm?”
“…….T-That’s….”

Harrigan, who was searching for the right words, finally hung down her head in disappointment.

“I am sorry.”
“No Harrigan, you don’t have to go that far.”

At Naga’s words, Vita ogled him.

“Should I understand that you don’t need my support, Dragon King?”

“No that’s not what I mean” – Sitting on the floor, Naga waved his hand.

“Your assistance is indispensable for us. I’m more and more interested in your power now that I’ve just witnessed it. However, you see, it’s not like we are here just to beg you for help.”
“…Then, for what other purpose?”
“I’ve already told you, but we want to create a new world together with you. That means, we are going to cooperate with each other on equal terms. It’s not the matter of who’s more superior or inferior nor does it matter who’s the one making the request.”

Naga, who said so, stood up and folded his hands in front of his chest. Striking a daunting pose, he gazed at Vita.

“I’ll repeat it one more time, Vita-san. Won’t you join us in making a new world where both the humans and the witches can coexist with each other in peace? This is the only way to create a bright future for the witches.”
“The only way.”

A spark rose in the air as their sights collided with each other’s.

10

The witches from Sraymeyer’s household whispered to each other while making troubled faces.

(T, This guy, despite him knowing how fearsome Mother is, he still has the guts to talk back.)
(He will be definitely killed by Mother.)
(Even if he's together with Harrigan & the rest, he won't be able to escape from Mother's spell.)
(Since it seems our side here will be involved as well, I'd rather have him pardon us.)
(He's, indeed, a bothersome man.)

And then,

"A—hahahaha."

Because Vita abruptly started to laugh, her daughters tilted with their heads unintentionally.
Continuing her burst of laughter for a while, she finally ceased to laugh.

"I like you. I really like you, Dragon King-dono."

Rising up, she stared again at him.

"Despite suffering from my magic, you were still able to calmly judge your surroundings and see through the nature of my ability. It was a splendid work, but what fascinates me the most is how you can grasp and calculate the situation without losing your composure."

While the members of Sraymeyer's household were taken aback, Harrigan put her hand on her chest with relief.

(It seems we were able to please her.)
(As one would expect from Naga-san.)
(It's because he possesses a strange talent for captivating his listene-rs.)

Harrigan, Ais, and Lela thought about that; however, Langeais:

(I've heard rumors about him, but he's even stranger than the rumors say.)

Such was her personal evaluation.

Descending the steps, Vita once again walked in front of Naga.

"Since you're saying 'on equal terms', there's no way for just me to be in a high position."
"Oh? Then, it's fine to consider our request as being accepted?"

Vita, who stood in front of his eyes, looked up at him without replying back. Naturally, it would make him look down from above.

“Even though I said so, there’s a difference between our heights. This fact doesn’t make me keen on working with you on equal terms. Oi, Elysio.”
“Yes, Mother?”
“Bring me a stepladder or anything similar.”
“Yes, right away.”

Elysione waved her long mantle, ran away, and immediately returned back.
Once she placed a small box-like thing under Vita’s feet, Vita stepped on it. However, the top of her head could still only reach Naga’s shoulders.

Whack

The soles of Vita’s feet sunk into Elysione’s face, blowing her backwards.

“As always you’re one useless girl, you rascal. Are we supposed to be on equal terms like that?!”
“M, My apphologies”

Elysione held her nose and stood up, then tried to bring another stepladder-like thing once again.

“That’s fine, you don’t have to. Become my stepladder instead, you rascal.”
“E….Eh…?”

Elysione warped her face miserably.

“Do you have any complaints?”
“……None.”
“Then come here quickly.”
“Uuuuu.”

Elysione dashed with a tearful face and crept on all fours in front of Vita.

“O, Oi, Vita-san….”
“Ahh, do not mind, Dragon King. That’s because this is a ceremony where we need to be on equal positions in order to join our hands.”

Saying so, Vita tried to step on Elysione’s back with her right leg.

“Yea, I got that, I got that. By the way, I’m still not familiar with your customs, but if you say we need to be on the same height to form an alliance, I can just lower myself.”
“Hohou. Are you raising an objection against what I do?”

Vita stared at him; nevertheless, Naga didn’t pay attention to that.

“For now, I’m probably your guest. You shouldn’t make your daughters that uncouth in front of your guests.”

Elysione, who was on her hands and feet, looked up at Naga with a strange expression.

“Fuumu. Unlike your appearance, you seem to be quite good at being considerate.”
“There’s probably nothing wrong about my appearance. From the way it looks, I’m most likely a gentle and considerate person!”
“Where do you see that?”
“……Then, what am I in your eyes?”
“That’s right. A careless, reckless, unrefined…. pervert?”

Because Harrigan, Ais, and Lela nodded deeply in agreement, Naga snapped and pointed at three of them.

“Hey there! Don’t nod at the same time!”
“Kukuku, it appears my judgement was no mistake.”
“Nono, it’s full of mistakes. Speaking of which, don’t you all have a negative opinion about me?”
“Won’t you start showing us your good side? Since we’ll be fighting together as allies from now on, there will be plenty of opportunities for that.”

Naga couldn’t help but drop his head with a dissatisfied face.

“Well, I guess you’ve got a point.”
“Hey, Elysio, you can stand up now.”
“U, Um, am I really allowed to do so?”
“It’s for making Dragon King look good. If you want to express your gratitude, say it to this man.”

Elysione stood up and bowed down deeply toward Naga.

“I’m thankful for your consideration.”
“Yeah, it’s fine, it’s fine. Don’t mind.”
“Even though I thanked you, I don’t particularly mind.”

Once she said it bluntly after raising her head, Naga made a pitiful expression.

“Yeah, you’re right. Well, guess that’s fine, so”

As soon as Naga faced toward Vita, he kneeled down on one knee and lowered his back.
With that, the height of their heads turned equal.
She held out her hand.

Hm? – As he made a doubtful face, Vita too became suspicious and withdrew her hand.

“Ah, that’s right, didn’t the Dragon King fall from another world…?”

Vita who muttered shifted her eyes toward Harrigan.

“You still haven’t told him about that?”
“Ah, true, I still haven’t.”

What you talking about? – Naga looked at them alternately.

“In other words, you see,”

Vita again stuck out her palm.

“Putting our palms on top of one another’s is the sign of forming an agreement.”
“I see, so this is how it works here?”

(I wonder how it would be done in my world. I have the feeling it would be something like putting a seal of blood on a document, or passing someone on as a hostage. Nevertheless, a traitor is bound to betray others, I guess. Anyway, if it’s about the form of agreement, this method here is far more convenient.)

Naga tried to recall his past events.

Making an obviously sarcastic smile, Naga tightened his face in a hurry.

Hey, stick it out – As if being in a rush, Vita urged him to place his already spread out right palm on hers.

“With this, we are now formally allies, the so called – alliance treaty. It’s fine for you to call me Vita.”

Vita uttered with satisfaction.

However, Naga stared at their palms seriously.

“What? Is there something you’re not content with?”
“No… I just thought your palm looks cute.”
“Wha?!”

“Your appearance is also cute, but your small palm is soft and lovely as well. Yet you’re telling me you’re older than Harrigan, I can’t believe it.”

(Ah, are you a fool? If you touch upon Mother’s age….)

Elysione averted her eyes while imagining Vita bursting in rage.

(She's going to get angry! Very angry!)

"Fumu. Naga is indeed quite an honest guy."

(Eh? She isn't angry? Rather, she seems to be in a good mood?)

Elysione turned back her face with a surprised expression.

Certainly, it looked like Vita was laughing humorously.

Elysione felt that Harrigan had a discontented face, but she touched her chest in relief at the fact that Vita didn't get mad at Naga's unreasonable words.

"I'm honestly not sure how should I say it, but you and Harrigan probably look like parent and daughter."
"Haahaha, you mean so, you mean so? Parent and daughter? Then shall I refer to Harrigan as Mother from now on?"

Harrigan's face turned much more displeased.

"When it comes to that, wouldn't Harrigan be the mother of Elysione's mother, in other words, her grandma?"

Startle

Elysione's body turned stiff.

"Hey, Elysione, how about you call Harrigan grandmother?"
"Eeeh? N,n,n,n,no, no, um…"

Harrigan's hair squirmed in the air, which was greatly ominous.
Once her eyes met with Harrigan, who was staring fixedly at her, Elysione felt her body tremble.

If you dare to call me grandmother, I'll pulverize all your bones.

Harrigan's eyes seemed to say.

However,

"Hey, what's the matter? Won't you quickly call her 'grandmother'?"

Was Vita in a good, or perhaps a bad mood? She said an unreasonable thing with her usual manner.

And then, getting herself dragged into quarrel was the same as usual for Elysione. Elysione searched for an escape in the surroundings with bloodshot eyes, but she understood there wasn't one from the very beginning.

The other witches averted their eyes and looked at the ceiling as if telling her not to come over, there was no courageous person who would try to save her.

Ais and Lela looked at each other with a trouble face, whereas, Langeais wasn't concerned about it.

Harrigan's eyebrows twitched upward more and more.

"Ha….hahaha…."

Putting a stiff smile on her face, Elysione wondered whether it would be more painful to die from getting punched by Harrigan's solid hair or squashed by Vita's magic….such was her thought. Then, a rescue came from an unpredicted place.

Naga stood up and called out.

"Oi, Vita-san."
"That's why I told you it's fine to call me Vita."
"Then, Vita."
"What?"
"Don't pick on your own daughter like that."
"Mu?"
"And Harrigan too."
"W, What?"
"Your expression looks scary."
"Hnn?"

Harrigan covered her face in a hurry with both her hands.

"Starting from today, we're going to be allies, so get along with each other."
"Mu…true. I'm of the same opinion."
"A, Ahh, I've no objections…."

Despite saying so, both of them couldn't hide their blatantly dissatisfied faces and attitude, but Naga didn't care about that.

Hey hey – He called Harrigan.

"It won't do if it's just me and Vita. Harrigan and Vita as well, unless you two show that you approve of the alliance, it will be hard to demonstrate that to your daughters."
"Mu? Still…"
"No, that's……"

As they both had sullen faces and didn't feel inclined to reach out their hands, Naga stretched out his arms horizontally and kneeled on his knee once more time.

"Hey, Vita this way, then Harrigan, this way."
"W-What do you intend to do?"
"That's why, if you dislike putting your palms on top of each other's, just place them each on mine at the same time. At this rate, it will make me some sort of a mediary…. but, with this, we should be able to form an alliance between both households."
"O…Oh, indeed, that's true."
"Right, if that's the case…"

Saying so, Vita placed her right palm on Naga's left and Harrigan placed her left on Naga's right.

"Excellent, with this, the alliance between the households of Sraymeyer and Haindora is formed. From now on you will be fighting together as allies…. Isn't it nice, Vita, Harrigan?"
"U, Umu, that's right."
"Well, so it came to that, I guess."
"Splendid!"

Naga, who said so, took his arms back and stood up.

"It might be sudden, but Vita,"
"What?"
"There's something I'd like for you to tell me."
"Is it about my magic?"
"Yes. Your ability will be the key for capturing Fort Ein."
"Using my ability for capturing Fort Ein… you say? Fufun, interesting. Then, should we hold a strategic meeting and get dressed up?"

Once Vita moved her sight toward Elysione, who restrained herself in a kneeling position, Elysione trembled in fear.

"How long do you plan on sitting there, Elysio. Go and prepare seats for the meeting. But this time, use the nicer ones."
"Y,Yes, Mother."

It looked as though the storm passed Elysione without hitting her. Standing up, she bowed down toward Naga.

11

Everyone sat on the folding stools placed in a circle.
On the right side of the circle, there were Naga, Harrigan, Ais, Lela, and Langeais taking up their position, whereas, on the left side, Elysione, and then witches whose names were Nemumone, Dora, and Karamaya sat behind Vita.

Summing up, there were 10 people together, discussing the plan to capture Fort Ein.

“First, we’d like to know more about Vita’s ability to control weight.”

is how Naga started the discussion.

“Primarily, I don’t tell that to other clans, but well, fine by me.
To begin with, it’s not like I didn’t anticipate we would have to get along with Harrigan and the rest. Not to mention, we are going to be allies starting from today.”

After a short introduction, Vita explained her magic.
Listening to her talk, Naga tried to sort the facts inside his head.

“In other words, it can be summarized like so:

・The effect of her magic will work on those inside a specific range, with her being in the center.
・The range can be adjusted to a certain degree by Vita using her magic.
・Once the magic is activated, the range cannot be changed. In order to do that, she needs to cancel it first.
・The magic can be used to either increase or decrease the weight of a target.
・However, when it works in an area of effect equally on every target, she cannot aim for specific people.
・In case Vita wants her magic to work on a specific person, she has to touch that person.
・If there’s a short distance between her and the target, the magic will still continue to work.
・The magic will work well on living things, but poorly on inanimate objects.
・She can control her own weight at will.

Is it okay to understand your magic this way?”
“Hohou, you understand it quite easily, don’t you?”

(No, that’s mainly because of your indirect explanation.)

“Is there something you want to say?”
“No, nothing.”
“Fumu, that’s right, it’s fine if you understand it like that.”

“Is that so? Then, we might be able to use it.”
“That’s why, I’m asking you for what.”
“Basically, you will sneak into Fort Ein and activate your spell there. Once you do so, not a single guard will be able to move, right? Well, it will also depend on how wide the fort is, but…”
“Oooh!”
“What a plan!”
“Exactly!”

Voices of admiration were heard from here and there.

“Even without sneaking in, we can place you just before the fort’s walls and immobilize the guardians inside. By doing that, all our members can enter confidently without worrying about the enemy’s attack. Later, I’d like to steal the fort without sustaining any injuries, so if it’s this method, there should be no casualties on either side.”
“I, I see.”
“What a fearsome resourcefulness.”
“As one would expect, you aren’t the Dragon King for no reason.”

Such things were said among the Sraymeyer witches who were full of admiration.

“Wait a moment, Naga-sa-n.”

Lela lifted up her hand.

“Certainly, I think that method should work if you put Vita-san inside the fort, or perhaps, near the fort. Still, how do you plan to do that while being unnotic-ed?”
“Ah!”

Elysione and the rest looked at each other’s faces.

“True, herein lies the problem.”

Naga said while scratching his head.

“Did you not think about that?”

Harrigan retorted.

“It’s not just that. There are various other problems to consider. Rather, aren’t there too many of them?”

Vita took a glimpse at Naga.

“Yeah, that’s right. I know there are lots of things that need to be solved.”
“Hearing that from you, it makes me a bit anxious.”

“Um, Mother.”
“What, Elysio?”
“If it’s about hiding Mother inside the fort, then I can help.”

Hearing her words, Naga reacted.

“What do you mean?”
“This girl, you see, Elysio can move between the space where her mantle was previously put… things like that.”
“What on… so there was such a convenient magic? You’re incredible indeed.”

As soon she was given words of praise, Elysione’s face turned a bit red.

“Ah, no, it’s not something I should be praised, for……”
“Ain’t you praising her too much, Naga? This girl tends to get carried away quickly.”

Elysione dropped her shoulders in disappointment.

“Isn’t that fine? You ought to admit that something is incredible whenever there are things like that.”
“Well, I’m ready to accept that about her magic, but it’s not like her power is almighty or anything.”
“Ah… is that so?”
“Right, Elysio can fly to places where she prepared mantles. In other words, she can only fly to those places.”
“Ah, so it was like that?”

Hmm – As if understanding each other’s words, Naga and Vita slightly groaned.

“Still, there’s the problem of how we should place the mantle inside or near the fort, right?”
“Indeed. Once it’s done, we will be able to travel easily. Is there any idea that crosses your mind?”
“No, I can’t think of anything out of the blue.”

Vita looked at him with cold eyes.

“It’s no good when it comes to important points? Guess you ain’t that great, Dragon King.”
“Don’t say it like that. I’ve only received the explanation about your magic just now, so there’s no way for me to come up with something that easily.”
“Well, you’re right about that.”
“Uhm, Mother.”
“What, Elysio?”
“You’ve mentioned it before, but what kind of other problems will there be besides this one?”

Since Nemonumo, Dora, and Karaimaya nodded as well, it was clear they had no clue, just like Elysione.

“You girls are truly simpletons.”

Vita exhaled a blunt sigh.

“Naga, you can probably understand it, right?”
“It’s still not clear what we are going to do after the enemy soldiers are restricted with your magic, right?”
“A….Ah!”

Elysione clapped her hands together.

“Mu, indeed it’s as you say.”

Harrigan too nodded down.

“I want to apprehend the enemy soldiers when they are unable to move, but the moment we enter inside the fort, we will also be seized by Vita’s magic.”

Naga shifted his sight toward her.

“What should we do?”
“Don’t ask me about that.”
“No, that’s why I was thinking if there’s anyone among your people who can move when your power is in effect.”
“There’s nobody. It’s because my magic is the strongest and so I can’t choose the target. Be it humans, witches, enemies, or allies, everyone is influenced. Uhahaha, are you giving up now?”
“E…Even though it’s not the time for throwing out your chest.”

Naga put on a fed up face.

(To begin with, Mother doesn’t have any chest to throw out.)

“Elysiooooooo, is there something you want to sayyyy?”

Shivering

Elysione shook her head from side to side with all her power.

“What’s more, there’s also the problem of choosing the right place to put the mantle, I guess.”

The moment Naga asked, Elysione braced herself and asked as if trying to escape from Vita's sight.

"Naga-dono, what do you mean?"
"You see, with Vita's magic centering around her, its effect will probably just cover a fixed range. Saying so, if we don't place the mantle near the inside of the fort….no, wait. Rather, wouldn't it be better to put it near the fort's walls? Hm… I have to investigate the fort's surroundings a little bit, or else…. As one would expect, I'd like to have more information on its territory."

Naga, who folded his arms while pondering, immediately lifted his head.

"Whatever the case, the plan won't succeed as long as the enemy spots the mantle. They might be suspicious of it, but even if they aren't, they will probably consider it as garbage and tidy it up."
"My mantle is…. garbage…"

Elysione looked down at her body with a face indicating her being in shock.
Because she appeared to be honestly shocked, Naga hurriedly made an excuse.

"Ah, no, I didn't mean to say it's dirty or anything in particular, you see?"
"Good grief. Wouldn't it much better to destroy the fort? We already don't use our own forts really, so their forts would also be useless, so destroying it would be almost the same as taking it."

With Vita saying so, Harrigan continued.

"I agree with what Vita says. It's probably the fastest way."

However, Naga clearly denied that by shaking his head.

"In order for us to advance toward the Kasandora Kingdom, we need a military position at all cost. I want to capture the fort without sustaining any damage if possible. Not to mention, if we can't take over a single fort, there's no way for us to bring down a fortified city."
"Well, I understand what you want to say."

Vita shrugged with her shoulders.

"I'll manage to come up with a method. Fret not, I'll certainly do so."

Naga remained positive til the end.

"You mean it? If it's someone like you, who was able to play with an army of 2000, then perhaps you will. What's more, do you expect anything from us, or is there anything else you need?"

“Needless to say, I need more information about the inside of the fort. Just knowing about its territory makes a huge difference in how hard the capture will be. Is there anyone in your group who can sneak inside?”

“If there was, we would probably be able to place the mantle.”
“Ah, that’s right!”

Holding his head, Naga looked up.

(Will this guy be okay?)

Vita gazed at Harrigan as if saying this.

Harrigan smiled clumsily.

“I, It will be fine… I believe.”

Is what she responded.

“I can’t really say it makes me feel at ease.”
“Vita, won’t you give me a single day?”

To Naga, who fixed his posture and made such a request, Vita nodded slightly.
“I don’t particularly mind.”
“I’ll come up with something no matter what, and return here the day after tomorrow.”
“Fumu, in that case, shall I also try to think of something?”
“You mean it? It feels reassuring to know that you guys will help.”
“No, the one to think will be me. That’s because…”

Vita jerked her chin and pointed at Elysione and the rest who were waiting.

“…they’re basically idiots who are bad at thinking.”

heads dropping in disappointment

Elysione and the rest hung down their heads in dismay.

“Rather, wouldn’t it be faster to have Lela assist?”
“I originally planned to have her help, but well…”
“If we gather both of our thoughts, we might be somehow able to find a key to our solution. At least, do your best. I’ll do mine as well.”

With that, Naga and the rest promised to meet once again the day after tomorrow and left the fort of Sraymeyer.

第2章

予期せぬ虜囚

Chapter 2 – An Unexpected Prisoner

Puffing her cheeks and displaying her discontent, Kay called out to Naga with a loud voice and tried to draw his attention and have him turn his horse's neck.

"Ah, wait a moment, Naga-san!"
"What? Is there something bothering you?"
"That's not what I mean. We've gone through the trouble of coming here, so can't we at least enjoy a little swimming?"
"We didn't come here to play, but…"
"That's why, I'm telling you it's just for a change of mood before we start our duties."
"Ah, isn't it fine? Naga-san, let's swim together."

Ixine expressed her consent.

"Umm, when it comes to swimming, there's no witch better at it than I am."

Nonoel lifted her hand.

"No, I don't get why you're boasting about being the best swimmer among us, Nono."
"Eh? So it was no good?"
"No no, it's not about that. I think it's good to have Nono teach Naga-san since you're most proficient in that."
"Good grief. It can't be helped, I guess."

While saying so, Naga dismounted his horse. Nevertheless, he didn't dislike it so much that he would complain.
Naga decided to see Nonoel, Kay, and Ixine off half-way from the Schweiz River where those 3 had been posted to keep watch. At the same time, he also decided to carry out some horse-riding practice.

Rather than him practicing by himself, teaching Ixine horse-riding was much more meaningful.
Descending from the great cliff towards the plain, Naga galloped on his horse while aiming upstream.
Kay was saddled on the back of Naga's horse, whereas Nonoel sat behind Ixine.
Nonoel, who was extremely frightened, clung to Ixine's lower back. On the other hand, Kay was, somewhat happily, glued to Naga's back.

Running at full speed, Naga created some space between his and Ixine's horse.
Continuing on like that, he called out to Kay, who was seated behind him.
"Oi, Kay."
"Whaat, Naga-san?"

“You, weren’t you fine riding behind Ixine the other day? Why did you decide to cling to me today? You’re not going to say that my riding skills are better than Ixine’s, right?”
“Of course not. But that’s not the reason. Somehow, it feels nostalgic, you see.”
“Ha? What? Riding on a horse?”
“Wrong, wrong. It’s not that. A man’s back, is what I mean.”

Kay snapped and struck Naga’s back with her right hand.

“I don’t get it. Speaking of which, stop hitting me with all your strength. It hurts.”

Today, Naga didn’t put his armor on. Since he was wearing a kimono with tight sleeves, which he had received from Harrigan and the rest, it felt quite painful for him when he was hit forcefully on his back.

“Ahaha, sorry, sorry.”

Kay withdrew her hand while laughing.

“Saying that a man’s back feels nostalgic….. Could it be that you’re talking about your father?”

Naga tried to ask this.

“Umm, well guess you could say so.”
“It’s been on my mind since before, but where and what are each of your fathers doing?”
“We don’t have a father.”

“W, What? It’s impossible for such an absurd thing to exist. Or could it be, that in case of the witches, children are born from just a mother?”
“Honestly, there’s no way for that.”

Ahaha – Kay laughed.

“That’s not it. Umm, perhaps it’s better to say we don’t have any fathers or brothers?”
“What’s the meaning…. of that?”
“Because explaining the story would take too long, I’ll tell you about it again on another occasion. You see, the witches basically know nothing about their fathers. They’re not informed about them. That’s why, it’s the same as saying they don’t exist.”

Naga didn’t understand the meaning behind Kay’s words, however, he understood her words were quite significant for the witches.

(Somehow, it’s become hard to ask them casually.)
Not being aware of Naga’s hesitant face, Kay continued her story.

“Therefore, nobody from the witches know their fathers, and so they have no memories about them. But you see, I’ve got some memories about my father.”
“Would that be…. his back?”
“Yes. Despite them being faint memories, should you say I remember them? It seems like he used to carry me on his back and walk with me. I’ve not the slightest idea about where or when he disappeared, but with just your large, warm back in front of my eyes, I can recall those times.”
“…..Hm.”
“Because of that, it suddenly felt nostalgic when I saw Naga-san’s back. Hehe.”

Wearing an embarrassed grin on her face, Kay once again put her strength into her arms around Naga’s waist and glued her face to his back.

“Honestly, I’m not at the age to have a big daughter like you.”

Kay, who loosed her face from Naga’s back, again hit it with her right hand.

“Even though I was able to immerse myself in some nostalgic feelings, don’t say things like that. Aren’t you a kill-joy?”
“That’s why, I’m telling you not to hit me. Listen to me!”
“Ah, this, somehow feels like whipping a horse. Yes, doesn’t it give a sound similar to fw-chi?”

Since Kei, was carried away and wouldn’t stop hitting him, Naga became annoyed.

“S, Seriously, this girl. Hey, stop it!”

While messing around with each other, they finally reached their destination and Naga halted the horse.

“Hey, we are here, so get down.”
“Alreadyyy?”

Kay made a displeased face, however, she wouldn’t complain any further and lightly descended from the horse.
Soon after, Ixine and Nonoel arrived on their horse.

Both banks of the river, where Naga and the rest had made a dam, turned into a rocky area. It was convenient for hiding one’s presence, and enemy soldiers would most likely not reach this far. Even if they were to do so, it would be easy to spot them as Nonoel and Kay would camp there and watch over the river.

“Ixine, hasn’t you horse-riding skill improved quite significantly?”
“I did it! I was praised by Naga-san!”

Sitting on her horse, Ixine clenched her right hand in victory.

Ixine, who was fired up, had on a leather-made and slender tube skirt similar to those found among equestrian tribes. On her feet, she wore a pair of shin high boots. Her outfit was unlike those commonly used by the witches, but nevertheless such an appearance was relatively fitting to Ixine's tall stature.

"Well then, I'll be heading back. Take good care of yourself while standing guard. Especially you, Kay. Don't make any rash decisions, got it?"
"Ehh, you're saying some cruel things there. I'm not the type of person who would act recklessly, you know?"
"Yes, I know. I was just kidding."

"Well, having some refreshment and taking a breather are important as well, right?"
"True, true. It's important, important."

Being in high spirits, Kay dashed down toward the dry river bank. After that, Ixine and Nonoel followed.
Naga, too, sped his horse to a nearby rock using the reins and ran after the three witches. As soon as he got down to the river bed with rocks scattered around, the three of the were already doing warm-up exercises.
Since Nonoel wore thin clothes on the assumption that her garments would get soaked, there was no particular need for her to change or take them off.
Unlike her, Ixine wore the tube skirt for horse-riding, so she had to take her clothes off in order to be able to swim. Her top as well was covered by a coat, which also needed to be taken off.
Once she took off her top and bottom, only a small breast wrap and a loincloth were left on her body. However, despite that risqué appearance of hers, Ixine still moved her body with composure. Tattoo-like, complex patterns that appeared on her whole body caught Naga's attention.
And then, if one was to describe Kay,

She was doing gymnastics while being totally naked, with no loincloth or breast cover.

"Oi, Kay!"
"What? Naga-san too, isn't it better for you to properly warm-up before entering the water?"

Kay responded while bending her body left and right.

“That’s not what I mean. I’m asking: why are you naked?!”
“Hm?”

Ceasing to move, she looked down on her body.

“A….Ah…oops, I forgot that we are together with Naga-san.”

Saying ‘oops’ lightly, Kay scratched her head without feeling shy or embarrassed.

“You’re not supposed to forget that! Speaking of which, at least put on your loincloth.”
“Ah no, that’s because I’ve always been taking off my clothes when playing in water with my friends. Recently, I’ve been told by Ais to value myself more, but…”

Kay said so while turning around, picking up her loincloth, and putting it on while squirming.

(That’s an amazing view, indeed. Are you really fine with changing yourself there, Kay? Speaking of which, should I really be watching, but…. well, since I was neither told to go away nor avert my eyes, let’s consider this as OK.)

“Wai, Kay, you’re way too bold!”

Rather, it was Ixine and Nonoel who became red-faced.
Both of them moved in front of Kay and stood with their arms spread as if trying to hinder Naga’s gaze.
Finally, understanding it was no good by their reaction, Naga shifted his gaze away.

Kay finished putting on her loincloth and chest cover, turned around and asked them both.

“Hm? What are you two doing?”

Ixine and Nonoel collapsed to their knees.

“Even though we were protecting you from Naga-san’s eyes.”
“Is that so? Thanks.”
“Kay, you’re too defenseless./…”

At Nonoel pointing out, Naga too, couldn’t help but to nod.

“Right. Shouldn’t you have some shame as well?”
“No you see, til now, there’s been nobody besides girls, so we have no custom of paying attention to that.”
“I wonder if I should consider you as being exceptional. Well, still if you insist that you want me to watch at all costs I won’t refuse to do so, but…”
“No no, as one would expect, I wouldn’t go that far.”

“In that case, you better pay more attention.”
“I’ll be careful from now on.”
“Indeed, you’re one easy-going fellow.”

Naga was astonished; Ixine and Nonoel started to laugh.

“Kay is that sort of a girl.”
“Isn’t she? Despite Kay-chan not minding other people’s sight like this, she also has good qualities.”
“Eh? I don’t feel like I’m being praised.”

As Kay spoke up with a slightly hysterical voice, Ixine waved her hands in denial.

“No, we weren’t particularly praising you.”

Naga was infected by the sound of their laughter and smiled broadly.

(Being so relaxed, overfamiliar, and positive toward other witches, indeed, Kay is an interesting fellow.)

Not being aware of Naga’s thoughts, Kay spoke up.

“Well then, let’s swim!”

After they enjoyed themselves in the water for a short time, the four of them came ashore and dressed themselves.

“Well, now that we have refreshed ourselves, shall we take up our posts? Even if I say so, it’s actually Nono who’s in charge of guarding.”
“I know, right?”
“We are relying on you, Nonoel.”
“Yesss, I’ll do my best.”
“Kay and Ixine too, do your best, okay?”
“Leave it to us.”
“You can count on me.”
“If anything happens, Ixine will run back on her horse.”
“Understood.”

Like this, Nonoel, Kay, and Ixine took up the duty of watching for movements from the Kasandora Kingdom’s army near the Schweiz River.

3

The army in question would turn out to be Raibach’s company.
His company, which set up camp on the left side of the riverbank, was divided into 4 groups, so as to guard the river.

Gathering 2 platoons and 5 more people from the company headquarters, Raibach formed groups consisting of 25 people each, as units for tactical mobilization.

Assuming the witches came to this side of the river, there was no telling if they would only cross where the path was. Consequently, Raibach's troops had to watch over a certain area. Still, there was also a limit to how well 100 soldiers could accomplish this task. With that, Raibach divided his company into 4 units, each placed at a set distance from one another and spread out along the river.
However, in all honesty, he really didn't want to split his forces.

(Originally, it should've been 4-5 companies lined up along the river…. No, even with that amount it wouldn't be enough. Still, to think that that youngster would only send my company for this dangerous post.)

Whenever Raibach tried to recall the prim looking face of General Guiscard, he couldn't help himself from getting angry.
Even if they were told to temporarily observe the enemy, a unit that consisted of only 25 people could do very little. Providing they face a clan of the witches that had as many as 20 people, they would have practically the same numbers. 25 soldiers would stand no chance against 20 witches. Not to mention, they would probably be unable to even stall the witches until their allies arrived. As soon as they were attacked, they would just run away.
However, were they to move together as a company, they would only be able to watch over a single place. If that was the case, the enemy could choose a location freely and cross the river at any time.

(That youngster. Saying things like 'hinder them at all costs'. If so, send us more soldiers! Well, even without hindering the witches, we should at least be able to report once we see them coming, but….)

Regardless of that, Raibach's company, which was the only one appointed for guarding this wide area, was put in quite a dangerous situation.

(Indeed, recently I've been encountering nothing but bad omens since the time we attacked the witches' fort. As I thought, nothing good comes from being involved with them. Rather, should I retire from the army? After all, I no longer have a family to support. I wonder if I could somehow…. afford living by myself. No, I still can't be certain about that, I guess.)

Even if Raibach, who has been serving devotedly in the army since his youth, was to try his luck in some other jobs, he possessed no special skills whatsoever. If there was something he could take pride in, it would be his swordsmanship. Other things he could boast about were his military commanding ability and his eye trained for tactics, which he gained through experience, still…

(Guess those skills won't come in handy if I change my occupation. Were I to make the best use of my swordsmanship, wouldn't I be only able to serve as a guard for a caravan of

merchants? Nevertheless, considering my age right now, it would still probably be quite harsh.)

Contemplating on his own future, Raibach could only let out a sigh.

“Captain. Captain Raibach.”

At his subordinate’s voice, Raibach came back to his senses.

“What? Did something happen?”
“No, it’s not that. I came here to inform you about the newly arrived army provisions.
“Again? Just how many days has it been since we came here?”

The adjutant replied seriously as Raibach spat out his question.

“We’ve been staying here for about 6-7 days, I think.”

(That bastard, Guiscard. In the end, he just wants us to stay here! Speaking of which, if you have time to send us that much food, at least provide us with reinforcements!)

“Have you already confirmed its contents?”
“Yes, it’s done. I’d like to ask for your signature.”

Taking the receipt and feather pen presented by the adjutant, Raibach quickly signed.

“Here.”
“Thank you very much for your efforts.”

Once he handed over the receipt, Raibach called out to the same man who was about to retreat.

“Oi, Sirius”

The adjutant stopped and turned around.

“Yes?”
“I’m going to take around 10 people with me and patrol the river(?).”

Since there was some distance between their units, it was decided that each of them would assign some people to walk along and patrol the riverbank. Raibach was the one who suggested this.

“Captain, you plan to go personally?”

“Yeah, for a change of pace.”
“Will it be alright? If something were to happen to you…”

It wasn't unreasonable for the adjutant to worry about his superior.
Unlike in modern times, an army in this world had no distinct class system. If something were to happen to a commanding officer, there was a distinct possibility that it would cease to function. And if someone like the general in command, or a royal family member, was to be killed, it was possible for the entire army to desert.
One could say that the same applied for single units.
In the case that this occurred, there was also a vice-commanding officer in charge of every unit, however, the death of one's commanding officer would cause quite a shock to the soldiers.
Still, Raibach replied with a buoyant look.

"We have a good insight into the surroundings, so it should be fine. Generally, this task is dangerous in itself. No matter where we go, the danger will still be the same."
"That….might be true, but…"
"Don't fret. I'm just doing it on a whim."

(Saying that he wants to carry a patrol because of a whim, isn't it a bit reckless of him to do so as a commanding officer?)

As an adjutant, it was only natural for him to think so. Nonetheless, it didn't appear to be a matter big enough for him to strongly object.

Despite it being a hazardous duty, right now, no signs indicated that the witches would appear.

(I guess, the general's caution about the possibility of the witches striking was a needless worry.)

The adjutant thought so.
Because the witches have been isolating themselves inside the black forest for several dozens of years, it wasn't irrational.

"Understood. Then, please bring the 1st platoon along with you."
"I'll leave the camp in your care."

Like that, Raibach led a single platoon and went for a patrol along the riverside.

4

Nonoel travelled through the river while submerged.
With water magic being her main strength, she could breathe by gathering air inside the water. At the same time, it was possible for her to expand the gathered air and wrap it around her skin, allowing Nonoel to maintain a steady body temperature.
Thanks to that, she could easily stay active for more than half an hour inside the water. And if it was just the submerging alone, even for a whole hour.

Since Nonoel was also able to refract the light from the water's surface whenever she was diving, she could easily conceal her presence.
Capitalizing on that ability, she searched for any sign of Kasandora's army from beneath the river's surface.
Nonoel had already grasped that there were 4 units from Kasandora's army dispatched along the river, with each of them having around 20 soldiers.
She was currently near the place where the path was intersected by the river, where there were footprints still visible. Nevertheless, the area didn't appear to be heavily guarded.

(Guess it's like this. It's not like they have to walk near the path)

Despite there being some hills in the surroundings, the area was basically a plain with no wetlands or big forests.
It would be different in the case of a big unit, however, if one was to consider just a few people walking around, they could go anywhere and not just guard a fixed area.
Even so, there was a mountainous area ahead of the river. Since it was far more comfortable to walk on the path instead of covering the distance by crossing the mountains, Kasandora's troops would usually walk this path and cross the river here.

After going downstream for a moment and confirming there was no particular change in the Kasandora Army's troops, Nonoel prepared to swim back upstream, so as to return to where Kay and Ixine were hiding.

Being capable of controlling the water, she had no difficulty in swimming against the flow of the river.

Nonoel continued to move upstream while sometimes taking a peek above to observe her surroundings.
In the middle of doing so, she discovered a troop of only 10 people, who were walking on the river bank.

(Is it the usual patrol group…..? No, it's not them?)

Among the troops that walked on top of the embankment upstream, Nonoel recognized one person wearing a different outfit from the rest.

(He's wearing a more refined helmet and armor than the others. Could he be… a commanding officer?)

Back then, Nonoel did a meritorious deed by taking down a battalion commander as a result of her noticing the difference in the soldiers' outfits. Therefore, it was just a natural course of action for her to recall that time.

(Why did a commanding officer go through the trouble of patrolling?)

Nonoel thought doubtfully.

(Is it a sign of them being about to launch some sort…. of new tactic? Or maybe, they are searching for a plausible location to cross so they can counterattack? The danger doesn't seem to be imminent, but wouldn't it be better if I made sure just in case?)

Thinking to check out the intentions of the newly discovered unit, she drew near the riverbank.
As soon as she approached a point where she was barely able to hide herself, Nonoel positioned her face right below the water surface while looking up at the shallows.
It was a posture where you would question whether or not her nose would stick out from the water's surface.
Under normal circumstances, it would be easy to tell if something was hiding inside the water, even from a more distant place. However, as long as Nonoel was in control of light refraction, unless someone peered into the water right above her, there was no chance they would see her. On the other hand, she was able to observe the surroundings to a certain degree.
Ceasing her movements, Nonoel began to spy on the troop.

5

"There's been nothing unusual taking place, right?"

The 1st platoon leader addressed Raibach.

"Well, I guess so. It would be nice if we can finish our duty just like this without any problems, but you see…"
"When do you think it will be over?"

A shade of concern appeared on the leader's face.
Considering that it was possible for the witches to attack, his anxiety wasn't unreasonable. Even Raibach felt uneasy. But, there was no way for him to display that in front of his subordinates.

"Well, it's hard for me to tell as it depends on General Guiscard's mood."

Raibach answered in a casual manner.

"That's because the witches might come, right?"

The platoon leader asked once more.

"That too, remains unclear to me. Til now, the witches have been staying inside the black forest. It's difficult to imagine them leaving it today, tomorrow, or any time soon, but well…."
"Still" – Lowering his tone, the platoon leader said.

“Based on the fact that our troops suffered a big loss the other day, won’t the witches consider that….as an opportunity?”

Shrugging his shoulders, Raibach began to walk.

“I still don’t understand the witches’ reasoning.”
“Captain, where are you going?”
“I’ll wash my face a bit so as to keep myself awake.”
“Ah….okay.”

The platoon leader was taken aback, however,

(Despite being assigned to such a dangerous task, our captain is indeed a daredevil. As one would expect, he hasn’t worked his way up to become a captain for nothing. His battle experience is rich, and he’s also dealt with the witches. I think we might be able to return alive as long we have this person by our side.)

Being filled with admiration, the man thought that Raibach seemed reliable.

“Should I have someone accompany you?”
“I’ll be back quickly. More importantly, stay on guard and watch over the other side of the river properly. If you spot something, inform everyone with a loud voice and run back as fast as you can.”
“Got it.”

Putting a wry smile on his face, the platoon leader saluted.

6

(Is somebody approaching?)

Nonoel lifted up her face close the water surface, which was hard to tell whether it was sticking it out or not.
Certainly, there was someone drawing close. What’s more, that person was coming towards her direction.

(Could it be that he sensed my presence? No, I don’t think that’s possible, still…)

It would be better if that person were to go straight along the embankment of the river stream, but instead, he walked diagonally across a sand bar.
Nonoel saw that and was a bit confused.

Despite thinking it shouldn’t be possible for her to be exposed, she had heard from Harrigan that there were rare instances in which experienced swordsmen would be able to grasp the witches’ hidden presence.

Could it be that this man….? – she thought.

Nevertheless, Nonoel was overthinking.

Considering it calmly, there was a high chance that this event was just coincidental. But Nonoel, who was still young and inexperienced in battle, panicked a bit, and as a result, assumed too much.

(If I move right now, it will place me in danger instead. Should I let this person pass?)

Even if the enemy was able to sense something doubtful for a moment, Nonoel didn't think he would be able to confirm her position. Because of that, rather than running away, she deemed it was better to hold her breath silently in that place. Despite that, the person continued to approach the shallows in which she'd hidden herself.

(T, That person is walking as if he knows I'm here.)

While thinking so, Nonoel became a little restless.

(W, What should I do? Should I carry out a preemptive attack…? No, by doing so, I'll reveal myself to other soldiers behind this person. If they learn about us spying on this place, it might affect our plan of capturing their fort. As expected, it's better to let him pass…no, perhaps it's better to flee?)

What should I do? – Nonoel couldn't make up her mind.

At the same time, the man descended down to the riverbank.

"Good grief, isn't today quite peaceful? It would be nice if such days could always continue like this."
The soldier, who approached, looked around and said so with an easy-going attitude. Once he did so, he crouched down on the spot and extended both his hands toward the water's surface.

His intention was to wash his face by scooping some water, but Nonoel felt confused and reacted reflexively.

(Was my location exposed?!)

Nonoel, who tried to counter attack, unconsciously loosened her control of the light refraction.
The sudden appearance of a person below the water surprised Raibach. Not to mention, it was a girl who wore thin clothes with lots of skin exposure.

"No, it isn't a human, but, a witch!?"

Opening his eyes widely, Raibach stood up as if being flicked.

(He saw meee!)
Nonoel's body reacted before she could think.

Splashhh

The moment he thought that the river surface became choppy, the water rose up. And then, stretched out just like tentacles, the water coiled around Raibach's arms, body, and feet.

“Whhhhhhhat is thisssssssssss!?”

(This is bad. I don’t know what it is, but it feels incredibly bad!)

Having a frantic expression, Raibach tried to tear off the water tentacles, but unfortunately, he was unable to move. It was as though he was seized by steel, rather than water.

“What’s the matter, Captain?!”

Sensing something wrong, the platoon leader and his men tried to descend to the river bank. Raibach noticed that, turned his head and shouted.

“Don’t come, it’s a witch!”

With the word ‘witch’, they immediately stopped moving.

“What are you doing?! Quickly, run awa…”

Raibach’s body was suddenly pulled inside the water.

“Uwaaaaa?!”

The next instance.

plop

Leaving a small sound behind, Raibach vanished.

Naturally, his body was inside the water. Since Nonoel controlled light refraction with her magic, it looked as if Raibach disappeared. Or so they thought.

(W, was Captain kidnapped by the witches?)

“Eeeek?!”

The other soldiers ran up the embankment without a second glance and escaped at full speed.

Raibach, who was pulled inside the water, was struggling desperately. However, it was as if his body was restrained by huge invisible hands. He couldn’t move.

Blub blub bluuuu-

Raibach’s breath continued to turn into bubbles and float up.

(This is bad, I'm running out of breath….. Damn, really, nothing good comes from being involved with…Gahaa)

With a part of his consciousness fading away, Raibach awaited his death.

7

"What should we do, Kay-chan, Shi-chan?"
"No, I myself wonder about that."

Looking down at the unconscious enemy soldier dragged ashore, Ixine and Kay bent their heads. The complex, tattoo-like patterns drawn on Ixine looked as though they were squirming on her skin.

Finally, Kay lifted up her head and said swiftly.

"Since its bothersome, shouldn't we just kill him?"

Nonoel as well, nodded in agreement.

"Guess you're right. 2-3 minutes should be enough for him to die if we leave him to soak. How about that?"
"Oioioioi!"

Smack – Kay faced toward Nonoel and hit her in a chopping manner.

"I was joking, Nono. Don't take it that seriously."
"Ah, is that, so?"

Nonoel tried to ask Ixine for an opinion by looking in her direction.

"Because we caught him, shall we take him back with us for the time being? In the first place, why did you capture this person? Nonoel, was there some sort of a motive?"

"Ah, no, that's….. you see, I did it on the spur the moment and had no time to think ahead."

Beginning from that time, Nonoel explained the whole story in general
"Really? So he isn't just a soldier but a commanding officer of that troop? Now that you mention it, he's certainly wearing a high-class armor, unlike those regular soldiers."

Saying that, Kay nodded.

"If that's the case" – Ixine raised her right hand.

"I wonder if he doesn't know about that."
"Yes? About what?"

“I’m talking about Fort Ein.”
“Ah!”
“Wouldn’t Naga-san want to know about that? He said that if there’s detailed information about the fort, capturing it would be much easier.”

“Right? Speaking of which, it means that we’ve caught a fine prisoner, right? Does it mean I’ve once again made a glorious achievement?”
“You’re really singing your own praises, aren’t you, Nono? Well, there’s no doubt that it’s a great achievement, but getting your head gently stroked by Naga-san is indeed nice.”

Ehehe – Nonoel smiled timidly once Kei said so in a half joking manner.

“What? So you really want to be stroked by Naga-san? If that’s the case, you should have your chest stroked as well.”
“….That would be a bit troublesome. wouldn’t you say it’s still too early for…..”
“So the problem is age? Are you saying it’s fine when you become more mature?”

As Kay retorted, Ixine continued to speak.

“Are you saying you won’t be satisfied with just being caressed? Could it be that you want to be groped as well?”
“Uhmm, how should we bring this person with us?”
“Don’t try to dodge my question!” x2

(Nono…. I wonder if you were surprisingly this bold. No, rather than that.)

Kay turned her attention to the problem in front of their eyes.

“It appears to be quite difficult to carry him on one’s back, so…. by the way, when it comes to things like this, perhaps I could be of help, so… no. On second thought, let’s make him walk.”

As soon as Kay said so, Nonoel once again looked in Ixine’s direction.

“Will it do if we place him on the horse?”
“No, you see, I’d rather not have a human guy ride behind me.”
“….Guess you’re right.”
“Well then Nono, let’s wake him up.”
“I think it will be fastest for Kay to hit him two or three times on the cheek.”
“Eh? Are you fine with that?”
“Since he has lost his consciousness from drowning, giving him a shock should be the right thing to do.”
“Ah, that’s right. Well, fine.”

Kay said a small chant.
“Harden, harden. Become an unrivalled hardness. Oh Thee, become a body, become an embodiment of hardness.”

Her right hand which turned silver in color, was hardened.

“Pay attention so as not to overdo it. If you hit him too seriously, you will probably crush his cheekbones.”
“Got it. I’ll hit him gently, like brushing him, so don’t fret.”
“What type of a hitting method is that?!”

Ixine retorted.

“No, I get what you want to say, but…”

Kay’s strengthened body was solid to the extent of repelling sharp swords. If she hit him in that state, the man would most likely not avoid bone fractures.

Ah, that’s right. – Kay said after lowering her raised hand.

“Nono, it will troublesome if this man wakes up and becomes violent.”
“Yes. I’ll restrain him.”

Once Nonoel chanted in a grumbling manner, she inserted her right hand into the river and ladled out some water.

Soon after the scooped water covered the man, turning into fine strings and wrapping around his wrists and ankles.

“This will do.”
“Then, shall we start?”

Raising her right hand once more, Kay grabbed the enemy soldier by his collar and lifted his upper body.

“Okay, wake up, wake upppp.”

Slap slap slap – she delivered repeated slaps to his cheeks.

“Uu…..Uuuug…”

Nonoel and Ixine looked at the man.

“Seems like he’s regaining consciousness.”
“He doesn’t have any broken cheekbones, right?”

Using her strengthened right hand, Kay tried to caress his cheeks.

“Hm, should be fine.”

8

A strange sensation, which was somewhat hard but warm, passed through his cheeks. And then,

“Hm, should be fine.”

Such a voice reverberated inside his head.

(What…. I haven’t died yet?)

Right after he opened his eyes slightly, Raibach coughed and choked repeatedly.
“Kuh-ack-kuh”

Despite him choking, Raibach somehow managed to open his eyes. As he did so, the faces of unfamiliar witches unfolded before him.

“Uwaaaaaa?!”
“What the—?!”

At his shout, Kay, who became surprised, released him unintentionally from her grasp, making his head fall straight down on top of a stone.

“Awwwwww!”

Folding his knees and arching his back, Raibach tried to hold the back of his head using his hands, but they wouldn’t move freely.

“Awawawawa, what the heck is this, awawaawawa, what’s happening, awawawaawa—”

Raibach attempted to move his body by kicking and struggling, but his limbs still wouldn’t regain their freedom. It felt as though his ankles and wrists were tightly bound by rope-like things.

“Are you in pain or in amazement? Decide which.”

Hearing a voice pouring from above his head, he looked up with teary eyes.

“…….”
“……”

For a while, he and Kay stared at each other from close range.

“Witcheeeeeeeessss!?”

Raibach screamed with a loud voice, making her lean backwards in astonishment.

“Uwaaa!?”

Raibach tried to escape desperately, but it shouldn’t be possible with his limbs restrained. In the end, he would just tumble heavily onto the river bed.

“Awwawaw.”

With a stone from the river bed cutting into his body, he completely recovered his senses thanks to the pain.

Raibach stopped moving around and looked around his surrounding, trying to confirm the situation.
He was situated on a bank with the flowing stream most likely being the Schweiz River. Since the area was rocky and the river was narrow, unlike his previous location, there was no doubt about this one being upstream. And then, the ones looking down on him were three witches.

Conducting a quick survey from that little information, Raibach reached a conclusion.

(In other words, I was caught by the witches. Because of that, my body is tied up with their magic and thrown down on the river bed…… or so I think?)

As one would expect, Raibach, who had plenty of battle experience, could still judge a situation with composure, despite finding himself in peril.
Releasing all the strength in his body, Raibach fell on his back and observed the three witches, who looked down on him, once again.

(So these are…the witches? Looking closely, they seem to be different from what I’ve thought.)

The three girls in front his eyes appeared to be quite dissimilar from how they had been commonly portrayed as ‘vicious and inhuman’.

(Speaking of which, aren’t they just normal girls? Even if they can use magic, they look no different from normal girls.)

The figure of his long deceased daughter resurfaced in his mind.

(Were she to be alive, that girl too would probably be around this age and appearance.)

Being immersed in a sentiment that wasn’t appropriate to his situation, Raibach ceased any thought of putting up resistance or attempts of escaping.

“Hey, you.”
“Eh? What?”
“You’re, witches, right?”

Nonoel and Kay looked at each other’s face.

A moment later, Kay, who had returned her gaze to him, responded:

“That’s right.”
“Is that so? Well, guess that was an obvious thing. Still…..”
“Why are you asking such a question?”
“….You look different from what I had imagined.”
“What kind of imagination was that?”
“I’ve heard stories about you being atrocious, heinous, wicked, and brutal existences, which made me think you’re indeed fearsome in appearance. Like the ones with a mouth splitting til their ears, narrowed eyes, and protruding fangs.”
The three of them bent backward without realizing.

“That’s cruel.”
“It’s cruel, right?”
“Indeed, that’s cruel!”

“When I look at you from a close range like this, you certainly have unusual hair color and clothing. Still, your look is no different from that of normal girls.”
“Not just our looks but our insides too are similar to normal girls, you know?”

Raibach’s eyes stopped at Kay’s right hand.

“I guess, you can’t call that normal.”
“Ah, no, this is….”

She released her magic.
The metallic-like luster vanished and her skin color turned back to normal.

“What’s more, this is….”

Raibach tried to put up both his hands.

String-shaped cords, which couldn’t be torn off no matter how much strength he applied, coiled around his wrists.

“Is this magic as well?”
“Yes, that’s… true.”
“As one would expect, witches aren’t common beings, I guess.”

But, not feeling any disgust or contempt toward his tone of speaking, the three of them looked again at each other's faces.

"Then, what do you plan to do with me from now on? If I'm going to be killed either way, it would be nice if you could do it using painless and instant methods, so as to ease my death, but well…"
"We won't kill you!"

Kay shouted.

"Had we simply planned to kill you, we wouldn't have gone through the trouble of catching you."
"Is that so?"

Raibach breathed a big sigh.

"So I'll be tormented to death? Indeed, a horrifying end."
"We won't be doing that either!"
"You mean it?"
"….No, there seems to be one person capable of that, but at least, we won't do such things."
"Then, what are you going do with me?"

"We thought about discussing that matter with Naga-san first, and so we wanted to bring you with us. Still…"
"Naga? Who's that?"
"No, Naga-san is Naga-san. But the meaning behind his name appears to be 'Dragon King', you see?"
"Na….Naga?" [written as Dragon King]

Raibach widely opened his eyes, as if not believing the words he had just heard.

"Naga-san is a human guy and a member of our household. No, to begin with, it's not clear to us whether or not we should call him 'human'."

(Oi, oi, what's the meaning of that? Naga-san [Dragon King]… What's wrong with the overfamiliarity in that name?)

"Yes, it was thanks to Naga-san's tactics that we were able to repel 2000 of your soldiers."
"For real?"
"There's no reason for us to lie at this point."

Raibach wasn't directly involved with the battle, but he was still related to it since he led the supply troops. That's why, he knew more than enough about his friendly troops suffering an utter defeat from the hands of 'the witches who resorted to an unheard of style of fighting'.

(If there's someone like the Dragon King, then certainly, it wouldn't be strange for the witches to change their fighting style…. no, I still can't believe it.)

"We are going to discuss your matter with Naga-san. It would be much appreciated if you could follow us obediently, but…."
"…….Will I become prey for the Dragon King? Am I going to be munched on by him starting from my head?"
"Ha? No no, what are you talking about? Naga-san won't devour you. If they're young girls, he would most likely do so, however…."
"Really? So the Dragon King prefers young human girls? Well, guess that's understandable."

Raibach felt a small relief inside his heart.

Therefore – While being unaware that he wasn't understanding their conversation, Kay replied.

"Follow us obediently. If you decide to pick a fight or run away, I'll have to bring you by force."

Kay, who peered at his eyes, continued to speak.

"It would be quite bothersome, and you also probably don't want to suffer, right?"

Raibach exhaled a sigh once again.

"Yeah, I'd hate that. Understood, I'll follow along."
"Uuuuu"
Looking down on Raibach, who folded up his arms, Kay groaned lightly.

"What? Is something matter?"
"No, how should I say, I think you're also different from what I had imagined about humans."

At Kay's words, Nonoel and Ixine slightly nodded.

"While we are at it, what kind of human did you picture me as?"

"Look. Don't humans detest the witches just like snakes and scorpions? In that case, they wouldn't even bother to lend an ear to us. Despite that, I thought it was strange for you to talk with us that conventionally."
"Even among humans, there are different people."
"Hmm, is that so?"

For some reason, Kay watched Raibach with a face showing curiosity.

“Ah, that’s right. What’s your name?”
“Me? I’m Raibach.”
“I see. My name is Kay. It’s fine for you to call me Kay for now.”
“O….Oh, you mean it?”
“And then, here’s Nonoel.”

Being pointed out, Nonoel moved swiftly behind Kay’s back as if trying to conceal herself. With only her face peeking through, she said with a small voice:

“It’s……. Nonoel.”
“This person here is Ixine.”
“Uhmm, I’m Ixine. Nice to meet you.”
“It’s Raibach. Please treat me well.”
“Well then, let’s not waste any more time on chit-chat. Ixine, gallop back first and inform Hari-nee and Naga-san.”
“Hm, that’s right. Got it. Then, I will return back ahead of you.”

Saying so, Ixine returned to the place where the horse was tied up.

“Take care.”

Kay who saw Ixine off with her hand, finally turned around.

“Then, shall we go ahead, Raibach?”

(You’re going to address me without any honorifics? Well, it’s not like I’m in a position to complain since I’m your prisoner, but even if you’re witches, your girlish appearance and age give off a very bad feeling.)

“Can you stand up?”
“Hm? Yeah, more or less…”

Raibach cast down his gaze to the water strings that bound his ankles.

“Oh, is that so? Nonoel, you can remove them.”

“U, Understood.”
Uhee? – Removing the bonds on his ankles, Raibach gave out a voice which could have equally been from astonishment or admiration.

Heave-ho – Raibach stood up and stuck out his bound wrists.

“I’m going to be like this…. for the whole time, right?”
“Yes.”
“Well, I thought it would be nice if I wasn’t.”
“Then, you should give up and walk with us. If you try to escape, Nonoel will bind your

ankles once more. Speaking of which, perhaps it would be better to constrain your neck too?"
"Yeah, I won't. To begin with, I don't think it's even possible for me to run away from you."

Nonoel, who heard their conversation, felt it was strange.
The fact that a human and witch could talk casually, judging from her common sense, was an unthinkable thing.

(No, well, it might be that Kay is just a bit eccentric among all of us. She would start talking even with Naga-san in an overfamiliar manner. However, I wouldn't imagine for this human guy to talk this carefreely with us. I don't think it's due to Kay's speaking style, but I've always believed all humans detest the witches.)

Raibach's speech and conduct was an unexpected and refreshing experience that made Nonoel a little bit happy.

(Could it be it's possible for both the witches and humans to understand each other……?)

Nonoel considered Naga as someone exceptional. Also, the fact that he fell from another dimension without being bound by this world's ties of obligation, customs, or common sense was the reason he could give them a fair evaluation. This is what she thought. Nevertheless, looking at this man called Raibach, especially as somebody who wasn't just an ordinary man, but an enemy soldier, Nonoel actually felt that not all the humans are hostile against the witches, or that they shun them.

(Could it be that such a day might come?)

She carried that wish inside her.

(No, I wonder about that. If I was to say such lines around Ane-sama, she would most likely chuckle at me saying it's an empty dream, whereas Yuki would abuse me by saying 'you traitor!'. Despite that…)

It may be that Naga's evaluation wasn't due to him coming from a different world, but instead due to his own viewpoint and way of thinking, just like this person, called Raibach.

While walking behind Raibach, who was led by Kay, Nonoel felt that their small light of hope had, yet again, shone a bit brighter.

9

With Naga supposedly being in the 1st fort, Ixine galloped while aiming for that place.
Kay and Nonoel, who were bringing Raibach with them, walked toward the 1st fort as well.
It wouldn't take them long if they were to dash, but when it comes to taking along a prisoner, only walking was an option.

With Ais being forwarded by Harrigan after the latter had received a report from Ixine, the three of them linked up with Ais on their way and finally reached 1st fort just before the sunset.

Witnessing a small fort dyed in the color of the sunset and enclosed by a wooden fence in front of his eyes, Raibach had a strange feeling while reflecting on the few days he had spent here before.

(……So it's here? Good grief. Somehow, it feels a bit nostalgic. I suffered a defeat by trying to attack this place, was demoted from being a company captain to a commander of the supply troops, and was then reinstated as a captain. Considering all of that, to think I'm here now as a prisoner of the witches. My life has changed drastically over the past few days, which makes me want to laugh.)

Once Ais and Kay talked with the witches on security, Naga and Harrigan appeared in front of them, having been brought by Ixine.

"Oi, Kay, so you managed to catch a soldier from Kasandora's army?!"
"Ah, umm, actually it was Nonoel who did it, but…. Look, it's this person I was talking about."

Seeing Naga who came out of the fort, Raibach became surprised.

(So there was a man among the witc– wha, speaking of which, is this guy the rumored Dragon King? Rather than the Dragon King… he looks no different from a normal human. His attire is certainly unusual, but…… Not to mention, he gives off a distinct feeling from us.)

"Oh! So this guy is the captive?"

Naga walked straight toward Raibach.
Raibach was a bit taller in comparison with Naga.

(Watching him like this from a close range, as expected, his appearance is strange. His sword is inserted near his waist, and its shape itself is different too. Still, assuming he's the Dragon King, he is indeed young.

Such was his first impression towards Naga.

On the other hand, Naga thought.

(I see. Certainly. it's as they say. Despite him being brought along to a fort of the witches, this sort of composure doesn't appear to be same as that of an ordinary soldier.)

Naga judged with a calm attitude.

“You…Your name…Wha…is called?”

Naga asked.

There were some difficult to catch words, but Raibach understood.

(Is he talking with our language…? No, rather than talking, it feels as though his words are reverberating inside my head.)

“Umm, I’m Raibach. Raibach Lantier.”
“Is that so? My name is…… Naga.”

(Is he really the Dragon King? Or perhaps, he’s just referring to himself that way…?)

Naga who gave his name, talked to the witch next to him.

“I can’t ask him while standing, so how about we enter inside, Harrigan?”

The witch replied.

“I guess that’s the only option.”

(Huge, and by that I mean various things.)

Concealing his amazement inside his heart, Raibach ran his sight indirectly over Harrigan.

“Ah, Hari-nee, Yuuki isn’t here, right?”

Once Kay asked.

“She isn’t.”
“Ah, that’s lucky. Were we to take this man in front of that girl, she would make a fuss while shouting ‘kill kill kill!’.”

Ahahaha – Harrigan laughed.

“If it’s her, she will most likely do so.”
“Oi oi, you, I don’t think it’s something to laugh about.”

Raibach retorted without thinking ahead.

“Hahaha, certainly… it isn’t a laughing matter… I guess.”
“You too! I told you it’s not something to laugh about!”
He also retorted at Naga.

Because Naga and Harrigan directed their sights at him, Raibach shrugged his shoulders in a hurry and turned his face away.

“Should we first let him rest inside a room? He must be tired from all the walking to this place.”

Raibach became astonished at Harrigan’s words.

(To think that the witches would be considerate about my fatigue. I thought they would put me into a room for interrogation without any arguing, but…. Or maybe they’re going to drive me into a dungeon?)

True – At Harrigan’s words, Kay nodded.

“Raibach, come this way.”
She showed him a building inside the fort.

“What’s that? That girl, Kay, has she already started to call him without honorifics? Certainly, she will try to be familiar with anyone when coming in contact. Well, guess that’s her main forte.”

As Naga muttered so, Ais nodded with a slightly glad expression.

“You’re right.”

“Well, shall we go too? I’m looking forward to what he has to offer.”

Naga, Ais, Nonoel, and Ixine reentered the fort.
10

Naga, Harrigan, Ais, Kay, Nonoel, and Ixine had gathered inside a single room of the residential building. Obviously, Raibach was also there.

Besides them, there were also other witches inside the fort, like the sisters Linna and Linne, Cu, and Harlequin, stationed at their posts.

Raibach was released from Nonoel’s water binding, however in turn, he had his wrists and waist tied up in ropes that were linked to Ais’ wrist.

By the time Nonoel released Raibach, Kay whispered silently into his ears.

“That Onee-san, you see-”

Kay pointed at Ais while speaking.

“Unlike her appearance, she’s incredibly scary, so you better not make her angry by any means. If she delivered a single hit to your body, you’d die from having all your bones smashed, or your internal organs ruptured. And if you’re hit in the head, it will blow up together with your neck, you know? I’m neither joking nor trying to threaten you, but giving you honest advice.”

Having an awfully loathsome face, Raibach nodded in agreement.

“Ugh… you mean it? Understood. I’ll pay attention to that, but…”
”What?”
“You’re surprisingly kind, aren’t you?”
“Hm? Is that so?”

Kay, who tilted her head in wonder, turned her face back with a cheerful smile.

“Well, isn’t it fine? If you’re aware that I’m kind to you, you better repay it properly.”

(This girl…. Somehow, it feels like talking with my daughter’s friends. It makes me want to believe she isn’t a witch.)

At any rate, Raibach didn’t feel like running. Even if he tried, he would most likely not manage to do so from the witches. Were he to be caught, they would certainly kill him this time. Rather, it was much better to remain a prisoner.
What’s more, it didn’t seem like he had to worry about being tortured for the time being. And more than anything, being able to talk with the witches was, surprisingly for Raibach, somehow a little bit fun.

(I wonder if I could have talked like this, were my daughter still alive.)

Is what he thought.

(Then, speaking of which, I wonder what kind of questions I will have to answer. It’s not like I know anything of great value.)

Raibach, who felt a bit tense, was made to sit on a folding stool placed near the wall, and surrounded in a half-circle by the rest of the people. Naga sat was in front of him, whereas Harrigan was on Naga’s left, with Ixine being on the furthest left. Similarly, on his right side, Ais and Nonoel sat.

Naga began to speak.

“Well then, I’m not fancy of tedio….talks, so how about we go stra…to the point? Yo…., kno…something about Fort Ein, right?”

As one would expect, some words were hard to catch, but Raibach could still understand what he meant.

“I do possess the knowledge, but….”

“Do you als… know wha.. inside the fort?”
“I do.”
“Then how about, yo….tell me something about it, like its territory?”
“…..Why are you asking me such things?”
“I’m thin….about capturing that fort.”
“Whaa?”

Raibach became at loss for words, and the interrogation stopped for a while

Naga looked at him with a bit of a curious expression.

“What’s the matte…? Why are you tha…surprised?”

Being thrown a question, Raibach finally gained back his senses.

“Ummm…. Dragon King, I wonder if it’s fine for me to ask you something.
“I don’t mi…d”
“Is that so? If that’s the case. I’ve heard that there’s about 20 witches on this side, but is that true?”
“That would be Harrigan’s clan, you see. Since, this time, we have received a support from anot…household, the number has increased a bit. It would probably be aroun… 40, 50 people.”
“N, No, saying probably around, and on top of that, 40 to 50 people. Right now, there are as many as 300 guards stationed inside Fort Ein. Just how on Earth do you plan to capture it?”

“I wanted to consider that after I have ques…you for some information on the fort’s interior.”
“What are you talking about…. In the first place, do you think I’d leak out such information?”

Naga’s expression turned into an unexpected one.

“So yo…are not going to tell us?”

Once he was told so, Raibach responded in a yelling manner.

“Don’t be silly. I may look like a single person with no family or relatives, but I’ve got friends in that fort. Knowing that they might be killed, there’s no way for me to spill the beans. Don’t try to torture me or do anything similar to that, or I’ll pass you false details.”

Listening to his words and observing his expression, Naga made a decision in the end.

“This guy, isn’t he quite a formidable man? He looks to be someone worthy of being trusted.”

“It’s just reasonable for you to be concerned. But, you don’t have to go that far.”
“W, What do you mean?”
“We are thinking about capturing the fort without making any casualty among your soldiers.”
“Wha? You can’t be serious! Do you think I’d believe such nonsense?!”

Because Raibach lifted himself unintentionally Ais put herself on guard, however, Naga held her back and leaned forward. He fixed his eyes on Raibach’s face in front of him as if looking into it.

“You too, do you think I’m talking nonsense?”

Being seized by Naga’s gushing spirit coming from his whole body, and scorched by a strong-willed light dwelling inside his eyes, Raibach became unable to move.

(W, what’s, this bizarre force coming from this guy?)

“During the previous battle, we had to do things like that, otherwise, we wouldn’t have been able to repel the human army. After all, it was 20 against 2000 people. Still, I was reluctant about using that method since there was a chance for the witches to die. For the sake of our future, I’d rather prevent as many sacrifices as possible.”

Was it due to Naga’s words being filled with vigor? Or perhaps, him getting used to conversing with Naga? Raibach became able to grasp his words clearly.

“F…Future? What do you mean by future? And why do you want to take over Fort Ein?”
“It’s the first step toward establishing the country of the witches.”
“The country of the witches? What do you intend to do once you’re done with that? You mean to say, that the witches are trying to rule over humanity?”
“No, I don’t. In the end, we want to create a world where humans and the witches can both coexist. This is what I mean to say.”

(Is this guy, a fool? There’s no way for such a thing to happen. Is he serious about that?)
Not trying to hide his thoughts of being utterly amazed, Raibach opened his eyes widely and gazed at Naga. Perhaps, there was a hue of contempt displaying in Naga’s expression, however it didn’t look like he was making fun of Raibach or bragging about anything.
If it was true, then he was honest. Naga was honestly talking about creating a new world.
Raibach could sense the magnitude of Naga’s caliber, the difference which separated him and that person.

(The Dragon King, who commands the witches, and me, who can’t even fulfill my duty as a Captain. Is it natural for there to be such a difference between us? Despite that, saying he wants to create a world where both humans and the witches can live together….)

What they both looked at was far too divergent.
As well as Naga's range of vision.
And even their aims were contrasting with each other.

(If I were to say, unlike me, who can only think within my own scope as a captain, this man possesses an overhead view, just like a bird flying at the highest altitude, and can grasp every position and movement of his enemies and allies. Is this how it feels?)

Raibach, who had devoted himself to military service, suddenly thought that way.

"……Hey, you, Dragon King. Do you honestly believe it's possible for you to create such a world?"

"Ha? No, obviously, we should be able to do so. That's because I'm going to live together with the witches too, and I'm not a witch myself, you see. There's nothing that should be impossible."
"No, you're most likely the Dragon King, rather than a human."
"I may be holding a grandiose name like that, but I'm actually a human, or at least an existence that's closer to a human than that of a witch. Still, it's not like I feel any sort of inconvenience from that, you see."
"However…"
"You as well, haven't you been walking together with them before reaching this place? Did you feel anything unpleasant? You were able to hold a conversation with them, right?"
"No, No……"

Kay smiled at Raibach as soon as she noticed his glimpse.
He turned his face away in a hurry.

"….There was no such thing, but…"
"Right? Be it humans or the witches, both sides can understand with each other in a proper way. If that's the case, then creating a world where they both can coexist isn't far from reality, and we may be able to live together. Unless you see it for yourself, you shouldn't decide on your own."

At Naga's words, Raibach kept silent.

Certainly, Kay, Nonoel, and Ixine, whom he had met before, were far removed from the human's concept of 'vicious and inhuman witches'. Rather, they appeared to be more like girls no matter how you looked at them. Were he not to consider these three as peculiar and extraordinary witches, Raibach felt he could agree with Naga to a certain point. And looking at the other witches, such as Harrigan and Ais, it was all the more reason for him to believe they weren't extraordinary.
In addition to him being taught a biased belief, and their appearance being far different from what he had imagined before, Raibach became confused and perplexed.

“Then, shall we return back to our topic?”
“Eh? W, What was that again?”
“That’s why, I’m telling you we want to capture Fort Ein. Of course, without making any sacrifices on either sides. Furthermore, we need some information about its interior. So the talk was regarding whether or not you would provide us with any information.”
“I’m not fully sure about that myself, but even if you gain the information, it’s impossible to seize that fort with just 40-50 people.”
“Have you forgotten we were able to defeat 2000 people from your army, even though we weren’t supposed to win?”
“No wa….t, that’s true. In other words, this time do you have a secret plan as well?”
“I wouldn’t go so far so far as to call it a secret plan, but I think it’s feasible to do so since we have magic here.”
“If you attack using magic, there’s no way for you to avoid casualties!”
“Honestly, there won’t be any. As long we follow my plan, neither humans nor the witches should suffer casualties.”
“T, Then, how?”
“I can’t tell you much regarding our magic, but how about we assume there’s one that can immobilize people? If you use it, there will be no need to fight. With that, we can boldly march into the fort from the entrance and tie up the crippled soldiers.”
“Hm… does magic like this really exist?”
“Indeed. However, for that to happen, we have to decide on the right place. And to do so, it’s necessary for us to know, in advance, how it looks inside and where the guards are deployed. Because of that, we are questioning you.”

Naga, who finished talking while brimming with self-confidence, pierced Raibach with his gaze.

“If you don’t pass us the information and force us to use violent methods, both sides will suffer losses. However, there might be more on the human side. I’d rather avoid that scene this time.”

Naga’s promise about not creating any sacrifices among the guards was a pretext for him to quickly get hold of the fort with no injuries. Nonetheless, he wasn’t bothered with that.

“W….Will you let me think for a while?”
“Fine. Still, we don’t have all the time in the world. Give me a clear reply within the next couple of days.”
“U, Understood.”

With that the interrogation concluded.
Rather than saying interrogation, if one was to say, the content of their talk was far closer to a conversation.
This experience provided Raibach with a huge impact.
Harrigan and Naga decided to confine him inside a small room.

“Is it okay to leave him without anyone watching? Even if he’s tied up, the walls in the room are just single-layered. Don’t you think he might be able to break through them? Shall I keep an eye on him?”

Once she expressed her concern, Naga uttered something unexpected.

“It’s okay. But, just to make sure, I’ll stay together with him in that room.”
“Eh? Are you sure?”
“In whichever case, there’s no way for me to sleep with you guys in the same room. Or perhaps, you’d prefer to sleep with me?”
“Ah no, as expected, that’s a bit—”
“That’s right. Were I to sleep in a separate room, we would be occupying 2 rooms. It will be much more efficient for me to sleep in the same one with that guy. I may be troubling you, but please prepare bedding for 2 people.”
“I don’t mind that, but, I wonder if he won’t start acting violently.”

“As long as his legs and arms are bound, there should be no problem. Even without it, that guy doesn’t seem to have any intention of running away.”
“You think so?”
“Yes. He doesn’t appear to have a strong grudge against the witches. Perhaps, him not having a family or relatives in Kasandora is also one of the main reasons for that. Well, if you still insist on helping, I won’t reject it, but…”
“Then, I shall assist you a bit. Is it fine, Harrigan-nee?”
“If you want to do so, then fine. However, don’t cause any commotion. Got it?”
“I’m not like Ais, who would do that when getting drunk.”

Ais cracked a smile.

“Well well. I wonder, what’s the meaning of that, Kay-chan?”

Ais’ face was smiling except for her eyes.

“Ah…. ummm, nothing in particular. Yes, not at all.”

Being aware of her sight, Kay’s forehead became covered in a cold sweat.
Still…- Ais, who was grinning, stared at Kay for a while; nevertheless, the latter soon shifted her gaze.
Ahead of her, there was Raibach sitting in the corner of the room.

“That’s a bit strange, isn’t it? I’ve always thought that every human would loath us and keep their distance. To think that such people still exist.”

That’s exactly what I think – As soon she uttered that with a small voice, Naga said so while nodding in agreement.

“Since there are guys like him among humans, perhaps our wish of creating a world for humans and the witches isn’t just a pipe dream?”
“True. I’ve got the feeling it’s fine to place our trust in what Naga-san says.”
“Oi, wait a moment. Ais, do you mean to say you haven’t been trusting in my words until now?”
”Eh? Honestly, I’ve been doing that all this time, you know?”

Naga made a pathetic expression.
“No, just now….”

Or, maybe not… – As he was about to say, he changed his mind.

“Whatever. I’ll be sleeping together with him in the same room, so fret not. I’ll let you know when he’s in the mood for speaking.”
“Yes, understood. But before that, let’s have dinner. I’ll make a portion for him as well. Kay, I’m going to call you once I’m done, so please bring it to him, okay?”
“Got it.”

11

Naga and Kay brought Raibach into a plain-looking room that resembled a storage shed. Having done everything he had to do, Naga removed his sword from his waist belt, pushed away a mess on the floor into the corner, and spread out a quilt in an open space. Then, he sat on it and leaned his back against the wall.
Next to him, Kay also sat down.

Owing to the fact that Raibach was tied up in ropes and fastened to a pillar, they didn’t have to fear an attack by him, even if they decided to nod off.

Not being mindful of Raibach’s presence, Kay spoke to Naga.

“Naga-san, shall we continue our talk from earlier today?”
“Ah? What talk?”
“That’s why, I’m telling you it’s the talk about the witches not knowing their fathers.”
“Ahh, that’s right, you’ve mentioned about it before. Oops, my bad.”

Naga took a short glimpse at Raibach, and shook his head in agreement.

“Let’s do it on some other occasion. This may be not something a human should hear, right?”
“I guess so…. Still, if that’s the case,”

“Is there something that troubles you?”
“Not really, but I thought it would be nice to chat since we have some free time.”
“Free time? Seriously, you are…”

Naga put a wry smile on his face without realizing.

“I’ve got an idea. Naga-san, how about we wrestle with our arms? I may be not as strong as Ais, but I’m quite proud of my strength. Look, I’m an athletic type of person, you know? Therefore—”
“Athletic type?”

Naga ran his eyes over Kay’s body without any reservation.

“You don’t really appear as such. Well, perhaps you do, but–”
“I was told something rude just now.”
“Then, Kay, my dear representative of athletes. Will you take me as your opponent?”

Naga lay on his belly and put his right elbow on the floor. Soon after that, Kay moved to his front and did the same thing.

They grasped each other’s right hand.

“Let’s go?”
“Come at me anytime.”
“Three, two, one, goooo!”

“Hm?”

It was a close-fought contest of strength, but
Naga’s hand was finally pushed down by Kay’s own.

“I lostttt!”

“It’s a hundred years too early for you to win against me.”
“One more!”
“Fine by me, but you see, it won’t change much.”

While smiling wryly, Naga kept competing numerous times.

Raibach watched them both with a dumbfounded expression.

(Those guys. Could it be they’ve been ignoring me from the beginning? Or perhaps, they are trusting me? Whichever it is, they sure have some guts. As for me, just the fact that I’m inside a fort of the witches doesn’t let me rest at ease.)

Watching, with a sidelong glance, how Kay and Naga were enthusiastically competing with each other, Raibach exhaled a sigh.

(Good grief, I wonder what fate is going to await me. It doesn’t look like I’ll be killed any time soon, but If I continue to insist about not wanting to talk, they too will eventually lose

their temper. Had I known about this, I'd have long resigned from the army and become a guard of some merchant caravan. Anyway, I don't have any family left, so travelling from one place to another while doing precarious trades would also be worth considering, I guess.)

The appearance of Raibach's deceased wife and daughter resurfaced in his mind.

(Risa……Erina……)

He remembered his beautiful, gentle wife together with their good-natured and cute daughter.
About the time he first married his wife.
About Erina's birth.
About the time she turned 2 years old.
About the time she turned 5 years old.
And then, 8 in age.
Back then, his wife was still healthy.
They lived a frugal life, but despite being fairly hungry and feeling little freedom, the three of them huddled together and lived happily.

Their joyful moments as a family floated one by one in his head, and then disappeared. However, such a blissful scene wouldn't last forever. Raibach knew that more than anyone as he tried not to recall his memories. But, once they started to overflow, it wasn't easy to stop them.

It happened one day when his daughter was looking after his ill wife at home. Being overjoyed and full of spirit, Raibach returned back to his city after committing a meritorious deed. Nevertheless, by the time he arrived, the city had already become scorched earth.

Some savage tribe had decided to attack when the city's garrison was short-handed.
Invading the city, they killed, burned, stole randomly, and then escaped.
It was over by the time Raibach's assigned troop returned.
Raibach, who was at a loss for words, looked at the city that was no different from a burnt field.
He tried to search for his wife and daughter desperately, but could find no trace of them.
There were lots of scorched corpses, lying in burned houses and on the streets, all of which were hard to tell apart. For that reason, Raibach couldn't manage to hold a mourning for his family in the end.
Provided they were taken away as a prize, it was possible they would still be alive, even as slaves. He wanted to think that way, however, with his wife being ill and his daughter still being a child, Raibach knew the chance of that was slim.
Even now, his body would tremble and his heart would throb whenever he thought back at his despair, hatred, and remorse from that day. His mind still haunted by his regret from that time.

Why didn't the army increase the garrison stationed to defend against barbarians?

Why did it have to be his troop that left the city at that time?
Why did he aspire to join a mission troop?
To begin with, why did he enter into military service?
Why Why Why Why Why Why! Why! WHY!

Later, Raibach would contemplate on that repeatedly each day.
Having lost his hometown and his family, he wandered through borderlands, after which he was finally admitted into Kasandora's army. Nevertheless, he later decided not to marry and remained a bachelor.

From his eyes that looked up at the bottom of the roof, a stream of tears spilled over.

(Good grief. If I can't even protect my wife and my daughter, then becoming a soldier was meaningless.)

Rubbing his tears, Raibach released the strength from his body and lay down on his quilt.
Before anyone could notice, Naga and Kay, who had stopped arm wrestling, looked at him with a sidelong glance. However, in the end, they wouldn't speak to him.

第3章

未来への思い

Chapter 3 – Future Outlook

Part 1

Kay brought dinner in, and ate it together with Naga and Raibach.

Kay tried to chat with Raibach as they ate, but his replies were halfhearted.

“Tch. How boring.” Kay complained and kept the cutlery.

“Don’t hold back on your requests, Raibach. Aside from undoing your ropes or letting you escape, anything else would be fine.”
“No… I don’t have any requests.”

“Nothing?”

“How about massaging my feet, Kay?”

“What? I am asking Raibach, why are you making such overboard demands as if this was natural, Naga? That is so strange.”

Naga laughed in response to Kay’s retort.

“Just kidding, don’t be mad.”

“I’m not mad.”

“Then help me massage.”

“Huh? Are you joking with me!?”

“Of course I’m kidding.”

“How irritating.”

Kay snatched Naga’s plate away.

“Alright, I’m cleaning up.”

“Ah, there’s still a bit left…”

“I. am. cleaning. up.”

“Alright, alright.”

As Naga was smiling wryly, thumping footsteps came from the corridor outside.

“Hmm? Harrigan Nee-san?”

“Harrigan wouldn’t be walking so agitatedly.”
“That’s true, did Ais get angry?”

“Eh, wait.”

Naga waved his hand with his face turning green.

“We didn’t do anything to anger Ais.”

“That’s true, then…”

When Kay turned to the entrance, the footfalls stop. The door was then opened violently; revealing Yuuki with the corners of her eyes raised greatly.

“I heard that we captured a soldier of the Kasandora Army!?”

Kay responded affirmatively because of the pressure from Yuuki.

“I will kill him.”

Yuuki’s expression turned into rage and a strange light shone from her eyes.

“I will kill him in the cruelest way possible.”

Raibach opened his eyes wide and stared at the vile-mouthed Yuuki. He knew that Yuuki wasn’t joking, but he wasn’t afraid as he stared at Yuuki with a lost expression.
“Eh, what the hell are you saying, Yuuki?”

“You are the one speaking nonsense, Kay. Why didn’t you kill the enemy immediately!?”

“In order to gather intel.”

“Do you need to treat him like a guest when doing that?”

“I’m not doing that.”

“Yes you are, you’re letting him stay here and even prepared an entire set of bedding. If you are trying to get intel, why not torture him!? Did he spill the beans already?”

“No, he is still thinking about it.”

“Huh? Why give him that choice? We don’t have the time to wait, let me handle it. I will make him spit out the information we need. Let me think… I will cut off his fingers one by one. To prevent him from dying because of blood loss, I will cauterize the wounds with a burning iron plate. He will definitely give in after cutting off two or three fingers. If he won’t, I will cut off all his fingers and toes, and he will beg me to kill him. When he spills everything, I will take his life if he asks, and it’ll all be settled.”

The agitated Yuuki spoke passionately as she took a couple of steps forward.

“I will handle this, so back off, Kay.”

“Eh, don’t decide that on your own, Yuuki.”

Kay also took a step forward to block Yuuki.

“Are you planning to stop me? Kay?”
“If Harrigan Nee-san and Naga don’t give you permission, I advise you not to be reckless.”

Yuuki cast a glance at Naga who had crossed his arms with a serious expression and showed no intention to speak. After confirming that, Yuuki turned back and faced Kay again.

“You… are helping the humans?”

“I don’t mean to do so, and don’t do anything that will spoil the image of witches.”

“If you don’t back off, I will cut you to pieces.”

“Hmmpf! Do it if you can. Your wind blades can’t harm me!”

The skin on Kay’s exposed limbs started turning grey.

“You think you are tough enough to take my wind blades!?”

“Go on, try me.”

“Why are you protecting that guy!?”

Yuuki was furious as she pointed to Raibach, behind Kay.

“This man is one of the soldiers who are always trying to kill us! Why let him live!?”

At this moment, Raibach suddenly asked:

“Ah, let me ask you.”

Yuuki's body stiffened.

"W-What!? Don't think of begging for your life!"

"Was your family killed by us… by the Army of the Kasandora Kingdom?"

"Not by the soldiers of the Kingdom, but…" Yuuki answered softly, but then lost her composure. "It's humans! Humans gathered everyone and massacred them!"

Raibach watched Yuuki and his brow twitched.

"I see, you have a tragic past too. No wonder you hate humans. If you are bent on killing me… Please do so."

Bafflement flashed across Yuuki's face for a moment, but she puffed her chest with an arrogant look in no time.

"Look, even the subject himself said so. So let me do it."

"Eh, why did you say that, Raibach!?"

"Kay, you don't need to protect him, get out of the way."

"You two… Kay, Yuuki- you two are comrades, so don't quarrel over someone like me."

"Ahhh, that's why… Ahhh—! So troublesome!" Kay grabbed her head exasperatedly. "My head isn't that good; I can't process something so complicated~~"

After holding her head and squatting for a while, she stood up. "I still think Yuuki shouldn't kill this man. I will stop you."

"Damn it…" Yuuki cursed angrily. "If you dare to stop me, I will really cut you to shreds."

"Try it if you can."

Kay's grey skin turned silver with a metallic luster.

"What's with the din? I have a morning shift tomorrow and need to sleep early, so stop with the noise."

Harlequin said so casually when she popped up at the door. Noticing the tense atmosphere in the room, she stood stiff on the spot.

"Y-Y-You two, what are you doing?"

Yuuki and Kay glared at each other and ignored the baffled Harlequin. An intense fighting aura welled up about them.

“Yuuki.”

Naga said all of a sudden.

“W-What is it. Even if you try to lecture me… Eh, what are you doing?”

Yuuki turned her face towards Naga and found him kneeling on the floor with his forehead on the ground. She was shocked and took a large step back.

“What… the hell are you doing!?”

“I don’t know why you hate humans so much, and cannot understand how you feel. But in order to create a world where witches can live a happy life, this man is necessary. So can you please bear with it? I’m begging you.” Naga pleaded with her while on his knees.

“W… What…”

Yuuki looked down at the back of Naga’s head with a shocked face. She didn’t expect Naga to kneel down to her for a man he didn’t even know.
“I-Is the information this guy has that important!?”

Naga raised his head slowly and looked up at Yuuki.

“I will only know if it is important after hearing it, but it might be very important. If I can gain critical intel, we will be able to seize Fort Ein without sacrificing any witches or humans.”

Yuuki looked at Naga with a face of doubt, but her anger had been soothed a lot.

“W-Why do you care about the lives of those inhuman soldiers!? If we kill all of them, we can cut down the enemy’s numbers.”

“That might be true for the current situation, but taking the future into consideration, not having any sacrifices would be advantageous for us.”

Yuuki showed a troubled expression.

“I-I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“It’s fine if you don’t understand, but can you trust me this once?”

“How could I trust someone like you!?”

“Ehh, that’s too harsh, Yuuki.” Kay interjected. “Naga saved us when we were in danger. If not for him, we would have been chased out of the dark forest long ago.”

“Eh… T-That’s true.”

“My head isn’t good, and I can’t analyze the situation, nor predict future developments. But I trust Naga. Since he said so, let’s leave this to him.”

Yuuki glared first at Kay as she said that, then Naga, and finally Raibach. She then turned around abruptly and left in a huff.

“Move, Harle!”

“Nyaa?”

Yuuki’s fierce expression intimidated Harlequin, and she made way for her.

Just like the time she came, Yuuki stomped through the corridor when she left. Seeing her back disappear into the distance, Harlequin turned back and asked Kay: “What happened?”

“Well, it’s a long story. Where do I start…?”

Kay looked towards Naga for help.

“I will explain this to Harlequin later. I have something to ask Raibach, and it would be better if Harrigan and Ais are present. They didn’t show up even after that ruckus. Did they turn in already?”

“Eh, I think Ais is out on patrol.”

“I see, she would have stopped Yuuki if she was here.”

(Or maybe not, she might even escalate things. Ais can’t control herself when she loses her temper, it would be an explosive scene if Yuuki retaliates.)

Kay thought about it, but didn’t say it out loud, afraid that someone would snitch on her.

“Harrigan nee-san should be in the fort, should I bring her over?” After Kay said that, Harrigan’s voice could be heard saying, “Why is Yuuki in the First Fort!?”

“Ohh, speak of the devil.”

Kay sighed in relief, thinking that she had washed her hands clean of the troublesome matter.
Part 2

Most of the witches garrisoned here had gathered in the biggest room inside the fort. Naturally, Naga and Raibach were also present.

The witches around Raibach were:

Harrigan.
Ais.
Kay.
Nonoel.
Harlequin.
Eleonortha.
Lela
Mimone.

And of course, Yuuki was absent. The sisters, Linne and Linna, were on guard duty, thus not in the room.

After receiving Harrigan's pigeon message, Lela immediately rushed to the First Fort on horseback behind Mimone.

Harrigan sighed softly after hearing Kay's report.

"That's why I didn't want Yuuki to know about this."

When Lela received the pigeon message, Yuuki was just setting off from the Third Fort. In the confusion, she found out about Kay capturing a human soldier, so she rushed here on her hoverboard alone.

"Forget it… No, we are not done yet. Getting detailed intelligence from that man takes priority… right, Naga?"

"That's true." Naga replied with a troubled face.

"Didn't that man say he would consider giving us information about the fort? Did something change while we were gathering?"

"Aside from the detailed information about the fort, there is one thing I am very concerned with."

"What is that?"

Harrigan prompted him to continue. Naga shifted his stool and faced Raibach.

"Raibach, you seemed surprised when Yuuki appeared just now. There are plenty of witches here that are unknown to you, but why did Yuuki surprised you so much?"

“Ah… Huh~~ you have sharp eyes.”

Raibach’s vision wavered and he stretched out his right hand to scratch his head. He then recounted his tale slowly.

“I had a daughter.”

Raibach said something unrelated, making Naga and the other witches to look at him puzzledly.

“If she were still alive, she would probably be about the age of you two.” Raibach said as he pointed at Nonoel and Kay. “It doesn’t sound convincing for a parent to say this, but she really was a cute kid.”

“……”

They were actually not interested in Raibach’s personal affairs. Naga and Harrigan looked at each other, hesitating about whether to stop him or not.

“When I was out on a campaign once, the barbarians invaded at the city I lived in, ravaged the streets and killed the citizens.”

Naga and Harrigan were shocked and turned their heads away.

“I couldn’t find the remains of my wife and daughter in the end. There were thousands of charred corpses in the streets, and I think my family was probably murdered there.”

“I can empathize with you, but right now we are…”

Raibach continued in a calm tone as if he didn’t hear what Harrigan said:

“That witch just now, the one who was shouting about wanting to kill me, is Yuuki, right?”

“Yuuki is hard to get along with, but she has her circumstances. If she made you feel uncomfortable, let me apologize…”

“No, that’s not it.” Raibach raised his head, his expression strange and complicated. “That girl looks really similar to my dead daughter.”

He looked up to the roof, his eyes far away.

“My dead daughter is actually alive and appeared before me. That thought occurred to me for an instant, surprising me.”

Raibach said sadly, but Harrigan’s reply was cold.

“My condolences for your loss, but she is a witch, not your daughter.”

“That’s true, I know that very well too, but… They really look identical, it’s like my daughter who survived somewhere appeared, so I…”

Raibach said passionately, but stopped midway.

“…I …I” He turned his gaze back from the ceiling, tears falling from his eyes.

“I won’t have any complaints if that girl kills me, my daughter must have hated me the same way. If I didn’t go off to fight a war in that dangerous time, and stayed with my wife and daughter, they would still be alive today.”

Harrigan wasn’t sure how to respond and kept quiet. Naga couldn’t say anything and watched him without a word. It was the same for the other witches. The entire room fell silent.

“Dragon King, you mentioned about creating a world where humans and witches cohabit in peace. If it succeeds, will the fighting between humans cease?”

Naga said confidently with a gentle smile on his face: “What a silly question.”

“If Witches and humans can be at peace, so can humans and humans.”

“That make sense. If you can create such a world and craft such a future, there won’t be children like Elena, who are killed at such a young age.”

“Your daughter is named Elena?”

“Yes, her name’s Elena. Ahh, Elena.”

Raibach buried his face in his hands.

“She must have been so scared, and suffered so much and… been hoping I would come to save them. But… I…”

Raibach curled up and sniffling sounds escaped from his lips. Naga, Harrigan, and the other witches did not say anything to console him, and his cries filled the entire room. A short time later, Raibach put down his hands. He turned to Naga with tears on his face.

“Hey, Dragon King. Can you really create a world where Humans and Witches can live in harmony? A place where humans and humans won’t fight with each other?”

“Of course I can… is what I want to say, but regrettably, I can’t make this promise lightly. I can only say that I will do my best. Doing all we can is important. If we don’t work hard, we won’t be able to make this brand new world a reality, and pave our future.”

(Can't make this promise lightly, huh? That means he views this very seriously. Maybe this man can really create a world like that.)

Raibach didn't have or want a dream. Maybe it's because his memories of his family made him sad, or maybe he was compelled by the hope that doing this will lessen his self reproach.

Raibach wiped away the tears on his face.

"If I tell you the details of the fort, there won't be any sacrifices?"

Naga didn't nod; he just puffed his chest out.

"I can't guarantee that there wouldn't be any, but the chances are high."
"I am not hoping for zero deaths, but can you promise to keep casualties to a minimum?"

When he heard that, Naga nodded firmly.

"Alright, I promise. I will seize the fort by utilizing a method without deaths."

"In that case… I will tell you."

Raibach provided them with the required intel regarding the fort. But after the witches heard his tragic past, none of them showed any signs of glee.
Part 3

Raibach explained the structure of the fort and the placement of the guards in great detail.

Lela noted down the important points on a parchment as he spoke.

After he was done, Raibach added:

"The guard commander of the fort is a man named Baldkeist; he was one of the close subordinates of former General Geobalk, who took responsibility for the failed campaign and resigned. Similar to me, he was assigned to garrison the fort as cannon fodder. On the other hand, he isn't too loyal to the new general, Guiscard, and won't fight to the end if something does happen… That's how I feel."

"I see; this information is a great help."

Naga smiled and turned his head.

"Harrigan, I have something to discuss with you."

"Hmm? Oh, alright."

Harrigan nodded, faced Kay and ordered:

“Bring that man back to his room. Nonoel will stand guard with you, so Yuuki won’t come and stir up trouble.”

“Understood, Harrigan Nee-san.”
Kay and Nonoel left the room with Raibach while Naga and Harrigan moved into another room. They sat on stools and faced each other.
Part 4

“Do you think his words can be trusted?”

After sitting down, Naga asked. Harrigan crossed her arms as she sat on the stool, answering thoughtfully:

“He doesn’t seem to be lying, at least he is not lying to us blatantly. What do you think, Naga?”

“I agree with your opinion. When he was talking about his daughter, his tears were real.”

“That’s right. Assuming everything he was true, do you have any good ideas?”

Naga nodded seriously.

“It should work.”

“It will work? Really!?”

“The most important part of the plan is to get Elysione or Vita near the fort. From what we heard about the structure of the fort, there isn’t a need to infiltrate the it; just being near the walls would be enough.”

“That would mean sending Elysione first, right?”

“This is the safest and simplest way, but letting Vita approach the fort herself, without Elysione, is also an option.”

“That is true, but Vita doesn’t have much defense. She could manipulate weight to guard herself, but if she does that, even we won’t be able to go near the fort.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem.”

“How do you plan to solve this?”

“We have people who can launch ranged attacks. I plan to use this method to tie up the enemy’s forces, then distract them, and use the chances to approach.”

Harrigan thought about it for a moment and turned her face back.
“The long range attacker is Ais?”

“That’s right, Ais’ stone throwing attack is very powerful, and she can attack from outside the range of normal bows. It would be hard for the defending soldiers to handle her.”

“Won’t they leave the fort and sally forth?”

“The enemy are witches, and you think they would dare to send two hundred soldiers to counterattack?”

Harrigan shook her head, as that make sense.

“I don’t think they have the guts.”

“If they move out in full force and leave the fort empty, that will play into my hands. If Ais, Lela and Yuuki keep attacking from a distance, they should be able to intimidate them and keep their attention. Vita can use the chance to approach.”

“Is doing that alright? Vita is a crucial figure in this operation, isn’t she? If she gets injured, wouldn’t the entire plan be ruined?”

“You are right, but logically speaking, Vita won’t be taking too big of a risk.”

“…I hope so.”

“But just to be safe, we should prepare Elysione’s cloak so it can be used at a moment’s notice.”

Harrigan leaned forward and asked:

“Specifically speaking, how are you planning to take the fort?”

“Here’s what I plan to do.”

Naga then explained to Harrigan the details of the strategy to capture the fort.
“First will be Ais and the duo of Yuuki and Lela, who will attack at long range from two different places. Let’s set them to the west and south. Ais will throw rocks and Yuuki will carry Lela and her talismans into the sky above the fort, before making them burst into flames as she tosses them down. That way, the defending soldiers will fall into confusion.”

“Once the soldiers focus their attention on them, Kay will use this chance to charge to the eastern wall, and of course, bring Elysione’s cloak with her. If she hardens her body, the soldiers won’t be able to harm her no matter how many arrows they shoot. Once she has reached the wall, she needs to place the cloak down. The soldiers in the fort won’t leave the fort just to take the cloak, since they are under the witches’ attack.”

“When Vita uses her spell, it will be best to gather the defending forces in the east. So after Kay puts down the cloak, the participating witches will need to show themselves. Ais will stop and Yuuki will retreat. That should get the soldiers, who still have the strength to defend, to gather on the eastern walls.”

“Once Kay has put down the cloak, Elysione will immediately bring Vita to the wall. Kay will then withdraw temporarily… No, I figure she should stay put, and act as Elysione and Vita’s guard.”

“Once Vita teleports to the wall, she will begin her spell immediately. As for the structure of the fort, assuming the information given by Raibach is correct, almost all of the soldiers should be unable to move. If not all, then at least 80% of them should be incapacitated. When Vita uses her spell, Elysione won’t be able to move either, she’ll have to bear with it then.”

“We will leave the north alone, and attack from the west and the south. We will then close in from the east. This is to show the fort soldiers that there are no threats from the north. This is to give the soldiers the impression that, ‘we won’t be able to escape if we are completely surrounded, let’s run while we are still able to do so.’”

“When Vita uses the spell ‘Song of Gravity’ and captures all the soldiers gathered on the eastern side, we need to find a way to tie up these soldiers, so they won’t be able to move freely when the spell is released. To prevent Vita from being attacked by soldiers outside her range, Ais would need to attack more fiercely.

“Wait a moment, Naga.”

Harrigan raised her hand to stop Naga’s explanation.

“You mentioned tying up the soldiers while they are immobile, but how do you do that specifically? We witches can’t resist Vita’s magic and enter the range of her spell. Our bodies will become heavy and we won’t be able to move if we go in, so how can we tie up the soldiers… Why are you staring so intensely at my body!?”

“Vita’s magic will increase a person’s original weight by two or three times, correct? Compared to Lela and Kay, it would be hard for you to move…”

Knock

“That hurts!”

Knock knock knock
“That really hurts! Don’t keep hitting me with your hair!”

The teary Naga leapt backwards from his stool to dodge the attack. Harrigan pulled her head of hardened hair back, but her eyes were full of fury as she glared at Naga.

“You are not considerate towards girls at all.”

“No such thing, I am famous for being considerate… probably.”

“You actually have the cheeks to say that.”

Harrigan blew her top once again and Naga waved his hands in front of him hurriedly.

“Alright, I know, it’s my fault.”

“Sorry”— Naga lowered his head in apology, and Harrigan’s hair fell onto her shoulders. Naga returned to his seat when he saw that.

“Alright, back to the topic.” Harrigan said grudgingly, after Naga sat properly.

“Ais might be able to move after Vita casts her spell, but that would take all her strength. It will also take a long time to bind the three hundred soldiers in the fort, and I don’t think Vita’s spell can last that long.”

“Speaking of which, she didn’t mention how long her spell could last.”

“This is her personal secret. The better known one’s magic is, the bigger the disadvantage. Not all witches live harmoniously with each other. More accurately speaking, most of us see each other as enemies.”

“I see, so even while facing the threat of being invaded by other nations, there are inter-tribe battles as well. I think I have heard something so regrettable in the past too.”

Naga was troubled.

(By the way, I have a feeling that this is something I experienced personally.)

“Something the matter?”

Naga looked at the ceiling deep in thought, and shook his head when Harrigan asked.

“There is a way to solve this problem.”

“There is a way!?”

Harrigan was shocked, and made an impressed expression.

“I see, as expected of Dragon King-sama.”

“Don’t mock me.”

“I’m not mocking you. Since there is a way, isn’t Fort Ein is as good as ours?”

Harrigan said confidently and Naga’s face turned serious.

“But there is a serious problem with this.”
“You mean there is a risk? But there is always some risk if we want to succeed, and our target is to take the fort without anyone dying or damaging the fort.”

“No, not that kind of danger.”

“???”

“The danger I am referring to is Yuuki. Specifically speaking, I am going to entrust her with a mission, but if I do that now, my life will probably be in danger…”

Naga sighed after saying that, and Harrigan laughed:

“What, so it’s that thing. I will order Yuuki to do it then.”

“I don’t think she will disobey if you give the word. No, that’s hard to say. Maybe she will resist strongly this time, since the main strategy involves sparing the lives of the Kasandora soldiers. Even if she agrees, she might screw things up as it goes against her will.”

“Hmm, that’s true.”

Harrigan, who didn’t get it in the beginning, finally raised her head.

“By the way—”

She asked Naga:

“What mission are you giving her? Is it difficult? Why must it be Yuuki? Her magic is powerful, it will be hard for her not to harm the enemies while suppressing them.”

“The mission I want to assign her isn’t difficult, and I have no plans to use her magic to subdue the enemy.”

Harrigan frowned and tilted her head.

“What… do you mean by that?”

“This is what I mean.”

Naga leaned towards the side of Harrigan’s face and whispered.

After finishing, Naga returned to his seat.
"I… I see, only Yuuki could do it."

Harrigan groaned and was impressed.

"Not only will this method subdue the enemy soldiers without them resisting, it will also resolve the issue quickly, so there is no need to worry about how long her magic will holdout."

(It was the same last time, with Naga proposing a well-thought-out strategy. Normally, one wouldn't even think of utilizing Yuuki's ability in such a way.)

Harrigan was becoming more impressed.

"But there is also a problem, since this method couldn't be used against the soldiers inside the buildings."

"Ahh!" Harrigan pounded her thigh with her fist.

"That's true; this method won't stop the soldiers inside the buildings."

"If we can push as many soldiers as possible into Vita's magic range, the problem would be solved."
"And so, you need us to reveal ourselves at this point, so the enemy will think we are going to attack the fort?"

"That's right." Naga said with a nod.

"The plan is to induce most of the soldiers to gather near the walls or towers in their attempt to disrupt our attack, but I am not confident that we can draw all of them out. Maybe we have to subdue the soldiers inside the buildings by force, and this is something I don't wish to see. It would be for the best if they run away the first chance they get, because of the fear of being rendered immobile by magic."

When she heard Naga say that, Harrigan answered confidently:

"Even if they don't run, we have about forty witches here; handling a hundred soldiers would not be a problem."

"With your combat prowess, subduing half of the troops wouldn't take much time. But I hope to minimize the losses as much as possible, for both the witches and the enemy."

Harrigan seemed a little troubled.

"In that battle earlier, you showed no mercy to the enemy, but you insist on not harming the enemy this time. In order to get the intelligence from Raibach, you promised him that….

The reason doesn't seem to be this simple, so can you explain why are you insisting on this?"

"Because—" Naga leaned forward and said:

"The goal of this battle is to seize Fort Ein intact, and to change how the humans evaluate witches."

"Our… evaluation?"
Harrigan blinked.

"The evaluation of most people about how witches are 'violent and cold blooded'."

"But that's…"
Naga raised his right hand and stopped Harrigan who wanted to defend herself.

"I know. Anyone who has actually interacted with you all would know that isn't true, barring those with extreme prejudice. But the humans who have never met you all before wouldn't know."

"Eh… t-that's right."
"This mindset has been ongoing for dozens of years. The truth isn't important anymore, since humans already have a deep-rooted belief that this is the truth. And there are also things in this world that spread lies about the cruelty of the witches, for example: the church abusing the authority of god. This evaluation is already firmly set in their mind, am I right?"

Harrigan sighed heavily.

"Unfortunately… that is so."
"So we just need to turn this evaluation around, for the sake of building a peaceful world for humans and witches."
(T-This guy has a grand vision as usual.)

"The fort was taken; most of the soldiers were captured but did not lose their lives and were even released safely. I want to create this fact. Even if the Kasandora Kingdom tries to hush things up, the news will spread sooner or later as they can't stop the people's grapevines. Just the fact that the witches didn't kill the soldiers would be enough to make the humans doubt their impression that the witches are 'violent, cruel and merciless'. It might just be doubt in the beginning, and they might even question if that was the truth, but if this accumulates over the years, it will overturn the current evaluation one day."

Harrigan answered with a soft mutter.

"You vision is wide, and you can see the future very well. I feel impressed every time I see this."

“That’s too exaggerated; anyone can understand if they think about it in detail.”

(The problem is that no one can think about it in such detail.)

“But things aren’t so simple, we can’t just wait idly and hope the prevailing evaluation will be overturned someday. We have to actively spread this truth that runs contrary to their evaluation, and disperse the news widely.”

“W-We have to do something like that too?”
“Of course. In a way, war is a battle of intelligence. Obtaining accurate enemy intelligence and spreading news that is beneficial to our army, all of these are crucial factors in winning the final victory.”

“Dragon King-sama is good with tactics, and is underhanded in doing so.”
“I wasn’t expecting that.”
Naga wasn’t happy about that comment. Just then, Harrigan shouted “Alright!” and clapped her hands.

“I understand; we will proceed as you proposed. I will beg Yuuki to help us, and do my best to convince her.”

“I will accompany you and ask her too.”

“In that case…”

“What? Did you think of a good idea?”

“Let’s bring Vita along to plead with her.”

“…Is it fine to ask her for something like this?” Naga was confused.

“The future of both our clans depends on this, so she has to show up too.”

(Your personality is bad too.)

“You have any objections?”
“Eh, I want to confirm if we have that important thing.”

“We should have one or two of them, but their durability and toughness aren’t enough to subdue the enemy. And we will need multiple, so I’m thinking of remaking them.”

“Can you do that? This part requires intricate work to be done on it.”
“We have basically been providing for ourselves all this time, so making something like that is no big deal.”

“I will leave it to you then. So, how should we start?”
“Let me think. Let’s find Vita, and work from the outside in.”

Naga laughed.

“With you, Vita, and me lowering our heads to ask her, I don’t think Yuuki can reject us.”

“But like you said, it would be problematic if she did this unwillingly, so we have to really convince her, don’t we?”

“If it’s up to me…” Naga’s face became sullen.

“Who else can we entrust with this mission?”
“Ugh…. That’s true.”

“We will be going to Vita’s side tomorrow, let’s ask her then.”
“Alright, it’s settled then.”
Part 5

The next day—

Naga and Harrigan visited Sraymeyer Fort right before noon, and had a conference with Vita in one of the rooms of the residential block.

Naga sat on a stool and explained his strategy, while Vita, who was also on a stool, didn’t say anything and listened carefully.

“… And this is the strategy I plan to use to take Fort Ein.”

After finishing his explanation, Naga stared at Vita as he finished speaking.

“Hmm, I see.” Vita crossed her arms and answered in a soft voice.

“If we used this method, not just us, even the enemy won’t suffer any casualties, and we can take the fort undamaged for our own use. It is a well-thought-out plan. But there are some elements of uncertainty.”

“That’s right, we have to confirm if the structure in the fort is just as Raibach described. Which is meant to clarify if the range of your magic can cover more than half of the fort. If there are any problems, we have to reconsider the entire plan.“

“And where to place Elysio’s cloak, as well as whether the enemy will fall for the trick and gather in the eastern part…”

“We can’t confirm where the enemy will be positioned, so we have to adjust our plan accordingly.”

“That’s… true.”

“There’s another thing to confirm with you. Elysione mentioned she can teleport with one more person, right? This means she can teleport together with you?”

“Hmm? Oh, that can be done, it’s just that we never tried it before.” Vita said with a solemn face.

“That’s doesn’t sound confident, will it be harder to move if there’s two people? Or is there some other danger?”

“That’s not what I mean; it’s just that I will encounter something unpleasant along the way.”

Naga made a strange expression and pressed Vita:

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t mind it; anyway, Vita can teleport together with me, so you don’t need to worry about that.”

“In that case…”

Naga and Harrigan exchanged a look.

“The only problem left is Yuuki.”

“Yes, only Yuuki is left.”
“Yuuki is indeed a big problem. If we are to capture the enemy alive by using my magic, Yuuki’s participation is very important.”

Naga turned his face towards Vita and asked with a serious expression:
“Regarding this matter, I have a request for you, Vita.”

“What is it, why so serious?”

“Can you ask Yuuki for her help together with Harrigan and me?”

“What do you mean?”

Seeing Vita looking at him, Naga scratched his head.

“Actually, I am not very sure, but I heard her family was killed by the humans, and she really hates human men.”
“I have heard about her hating humans, but there are no witches who welcome men; Yuuki is no exception.”
Vita shifted her eyes towards Harrigan, who sighed softly and said:

“Her childhood experience left a deep trauma in her heart, so her hatred towards humans is exceptional among us. If the mission were to kill human soldiers, she would accept it, no matter how dangerous. But if it is to capture them alive, I’m not sure that she will cooperate.”

“Eh, so the two of you are planning to beg her?”

“Yes. Actually, we are hoping you could join us.”

Naga said. Vita pulled a long face of annoyance when she heard that.

“As the Sraymeyer Clan Head, why must I do that for a witch from your side?”

“This battle doesn’t only concern the fate of the Heindler Clan; it will also decide the future of your clan.”

“That’s true.” Vita looked into the distance and pondered for a moment. She then turned her head back. “Alright, I am not very willing, but I will lower my head along with you two and ask for her help.”
“Thank you very much.”

“Sorry for troubling you, Vita.”

Naga and Harrigan lowered their heads to Vita and thanked her.

“You mentioned the future of our clan, which is correct. If enduring for a moment will lead to a bright future for my clan, I won’t mind the hardships.”

“My apologies.”

“When do you plan to ask her?”

“Time is short; I hope to settle this tomorrow.”
“I see. I will visit your fort tomorrow morning to ask Yuuki then.”

“Thanks for the help.”
After that, the three continued discussing the strategy of attacking Fort Ein. After finishing for the day, Naga and Harrigan bid Vita farewell and returned to their fort.
Part 6

The next morning—

Vita showed up at the fort as promised, bringing Elysione and another witch named Lilly.

She ordered Elysione and Lilly to standby in another room, and headed to the room where Naga, Harrigan, and Ais were waiting. As they would be asking Yuuki for help, Naga and Harrigan requested for Ais' presence in case anything happened.

At this moment, Naga, Harrigan, Ais, and Vita sat in a circle, surrounding Yuuki, who was summoned to the room.
"Hmm? What is going on? Harrigan Nee-san and Naga are here as usual, but why are Ais and Vita clan head also here? Did I do something wrong? Or rather, are you going to do something to me?"

After entering the room, Yuuki had been stealing glances at the four of them repeatedly.

"Why am I sitting on a stool, but all of you are sitting on the ground? Are you asking me to look down on the four of you?"

Yuuki's face was deathly pale, and sweat glistened on her forehead. Even the defiant Yuuki felt a lot of pressure when she faced these four people.

"Yuuki, we have something to tell you." Harrigan said in a serious tone.

"I-I-I think so too. I would have run away if the four of you didn't have any business with me."

Yuuki broke out in cold sweat all over her body as she replied, and the four of them knelt down without any warning.

"Hyaa?" Yuuki jumped from surprise and backed away.

"W-W-What is this!? What does this mean!? Are you all joking with me!? Is this a new way of pulling a prank!?"

Harrigan lifted her head and soothed her: "Calm down, Yuuki."

But Yuuki was still shocked and suspicious.

"Aren't you all… angry?"

"Of course not."

"Aren't you going to punish me for trying to kill the prisoner?"

"We have no intention of doing that. We called for you today because we have a request for you. Please take a seat."

Under the watchful gaze of Harrigan, Ais, and Vita, Yuuki appeared really timid as she returned to her seat, and sat down fearfully on the stool.

“We want to attack Fort Ein while avoiding damage to the fort itself and preventing casualties for both the witches and humans, so we will need your help, Yuuki. Please lend us your aid.”

After she finished, Harrigan lowered her head earnestly once more. Not just her, Naga, Ais, and even Vita, who was the head of another clan, pressed their foreheads to the floor, begging for her help.

“This…”

Yuuki couldn’t say anything for a moment.

She understood that an important task would be entrusted to her, but if that was it, Harrigan could just issue a direct order. She might not be willing to follow the command, but Yuuki wouldn’t outright reject Harrigan’s orders. But Harrigan didn’t do that, and even asked Vita to beg with her. Yuuki tried to think about what this meant.

She couldn’t understand and gave up immediately, deciding to ask directly instead.

“Why didn’t you just give me the order? And what kind of mission will be given to me? Will I be in danger of losing my life?”
“No, it’s not that dangerous.” Harrigan raised her head and replied.

“I don’t understand. Since it’s not dangerous, why not just issue a command? But instead of doing that, you ask me like this. And while surrounded by the four of you, being asked is much scarier than being ordered. Also, isn’t Clan Head Vita an outsider? Why is Clan Head Vita lowering her head too?”

“Fufu”, Vita laughed cheerfully.

“I’m here to ask for your help on the Dragon King-sama’s request. He thinks you will find it harder to reject if I am present too.”
“T-That really makes it hard for me to reject, but I won’t refuse if it’s Harrigan Nee-san’s order anyway. Why go so far as to lower your head and ‘ask’ for my help?”

“Naga will explain this part. As for the mission we need you to undertake, he will explain that too. You see, Naga is the one who came up with the proposal to seize the fort.”

After hearing Harrigan say that, Yuuki scowled.
“So it’s because of you.”

“You don’t need to make such a face for me.”

“I don’t understand why we have to spare the enemies’ lives. After all, wouldn’t it be easier in the future if we kill more of them?”

Yuuki's critique might be reasonable, but Naga just shook his head lightly when he heard that.

"Conquering Tenka is not a simple matter of how large your army is."

"Ten… Ka?"

Yuuki wasn't alone, as Harrigan, Ais, and Vita also had a look of confusion. Lela's talisman couldn't accurately translate the term 'Tenka', so Naga tried to say it in a way the witches could understand.

"Hmm, eh… oh, if I use the term 'take over the world', will you understand?"

"Take over the world?" Yuuki still couldn't get it, and kept blinking her eyes.

"How is that possible; is that a metaphor?"

"Just think of it as a metaphor for overturning the common sense of the world that thinks witches and humans are sworn enemies, which requires revolutionizing the entire world order. Doing that is related to seizing a new world."

Yuuki had a look of wonder on her face.

The new world Naga envisioned and his goal for the future of the witches had not taken concrete form in her mind yet. But she understood that Naga wanted to create a new world where witches and humans live in harmony, and knew he was acting in order to build this ideal world.

(He mentioned this in the past; seems like he was serious, and he really wants to build a world like that.)

"If we can build such a world, then there wouldn't be witches with painful memories like me?"

Yuuki muttered softly.
Naga laughed gently.

"Yuuki, so you have the same ideas as Raibach."

"W-What?"

"He said 'can you really create a world where Humans and Witches can live in harmony, a place where humans and humans won't fight with each other?' and 'If you can create such a world and craft such a future, there won't be children like Elena who are killed at such a young age.'"

“W-Who is Elena?”

“That was Raibach’s child. Ten years ago, the place he lived in was invaded by barbarians; his wife and daughter were murdered.”

This seemed to have struck a chord with Yuuki, and she showed a rare face of sadness.
“…I-Is that so?”

“If Raibach’s child was still alive, she would be about your age. He said his deceased daughter looked very much like you.”

Yuuki sneered and reverted back to her usual face and attitude.
“He is just trying to get on my good side because he almost died by my hands, right?”

“He looked surprised when you appeared in the room, right? I don’t think he was faking his reaction.”

“I didn’t watch that closely.”

“Forget about Raibach for now, back to the topic. In order to build a new world, and overturn the common sense that ‘witches and humans are sworn enemies, I want to avoid killing any enemy soldiers whenever possible.”

“How is not killing the enemy soldiers related to building a new world? I can’t understand.”
Yuuki puffed her cheeks unhappily and asked a sarcastic question.

“Witches are not violent and cold blooded, but are instead kind, benevolent, and merciful… I want the humans to learn these facts. It is not easy to overturn their values and perceptions, but we need to make such views waver. With time, their common sense will be proven wrong. When that time comes, humans will be willing to stand on the same side as us.”

Yuuki lowered her head and seemed to be thinking about something. Harrigan and Ais looked at Yuuki with eyes filled with kindness, while Vita observed her curiously.

Shortly thereafter, Yuuki lifted her head and mumbled:
“I still don’t understand, but I don’t mind cooperation for the sake of building a new world.”
Harrigan’s and Ais’ faces brightened, Vita laughed, and Naga was all smiles.

“That is wonderful, as there is something only you can do after all.”

“Hold it! Tell me what I need to do first, or I won’t be able to give you a definite answer.”

“Oh, this is what we want to ask of you.”

Naga explained how to use Vita's magic to seize the fort, and how the strategy will not harm the soldiers or damage the fort.

"Oh, so that's it… That's why Clan Head Vita is here?" Yuuki looked towards Vita.

"That's right." Vita nodded in acknowledgement.

"There is no problem in using my magic to subdue the soldiers, but there isn't any witch in either tribe who can withstand my spell and bind the soldiers. The only one who can still move would probably be Ais."

Ais showed a proud face.

"Aside from having a huge body, Ais also has lots of fat, her breasts and butt looks really heavy. No matter how strong she is, she might not be able to overcome the increased weight."

Ais had a smile on her face, but her veins were showing on her temple. But no matter how gutsy Ais was, she wouldn't dare rebuke Vita, so that smile on her face just turned stiffer and stiffer.

"Which is to say, the Dragon King-sama is giving up on binding the soldiers in the fort, and will be entrusting these things to you."

Yuuki turned her gaze to Naga.
"Your head is always full of strange ideas."
"Isn't my head really good?"

"To think you can devise such a plan. I don't think your head is good, it's just that your personality is evil."

"That's so mean." Naga grumbled.

Harrigan and Vita couldn't help their snickering, and Ais finally relaxed her stiff smile and laughed gently.

Never mind, Naga lifted his spirits.

"How about it, are you willing to cooperate?"

After hearing his question, Yuuki puffed her chest out and said arrogantly:

"Piece of cake. And the soldiers will be subdued by Clan Head Vita, so I won't have to worry about getting hit by arrows. It won't be a problem."

Hearing Yuuki's response, Naga shouted "Alright!" agitatedly.

“Since Yuuki is willing to work with us, we will begin the operation to seize Fort Ein immediately.”

Part 7

And so, the Heindler and Sraymeyer Clans worked together and began preparations to take Fort Ein.

The date that they would attack was tentatively set to be ten days later.

第4章

最大の戦利品

Chapter 4 – The Greatest War Trophy

Naga, Harrigan, and Vita held a great number of tactical meetings during their preparatory work.
Vita would frequently visit the fort of Harrigan & Co. while giving instructions to her daughters. However, since she was always being carried through Elysione's positioned mantle, Vita's migration from one place to another wasn't a big hassle. It didn't seem to require either too much time or effort.
Harrigan assigned a single room in the residential building for Vita and Elysione's personal use. Therefore, both the witches could use it as they wished.

"I'll kill you if you dare to peek inside the room, got it?"

Naga received such a threat from Vita.

"Like I would?!"

Naga retorted as he didn't plan to do so from the beginning.

For instance, knowing that the room would shine with a light every time Vita and Elysione arrived, wouldn't he wonder whether or not their arrival was successful?

2

A single room assigned by Harrigan.

It was just about the time when Elysione materialized herself from a mantle spread on the wooden floored room.
The mantle began to coil around Elysione as she was putting out her hands from the seams of it.
Elysione's body that stuck out from the gaps was naked. Or at least, it looked like her bottom had no clothes on.
Then, beneath her feet, the similarly nude Vita was crawling out. Unlike Elysione, she was, without doubt, completely naked. No matter how one judged it, Vita looked like a barely 10 years old, flat-chested girl from head to toe. After being told she was much older than Harrigan, one could only be filled with awe.

"Elysio, you rascal. Your magic is convenient, but at the same time, it's not. That's because I've got to get naked every time we teleport using that mantle."

While expressing her complaint, the totally naked Vita moved her upper body in every direction, trying to recover its lost sensation.

“Please don’t complain, Mother. Since I was able to reduce the excess of inconvenience so as to make up for it, shouldn’t it be fine? To begin with, there’s no magic that’s invincible or almighty in this world, right?”

“Hmm, that’s something I know even without you telling me, you rascal.”

Walking on the wooden floor while pressing her feet repeatedly against it, the completely nude Vita opened the lid of a chest placed in one corner of the room and took out prearranged clothes from inside.

Holding a set of them, she pushed them out to Elysione.

“Hey, put them on me.”
“Yes, right away.”

As soon as Elysione drew near, she helped Vita dress.
The prearranged pair of clothes were identical to those she normally wore. They covered little skin and had small notches that created a fluttering pattern. However, Vita’s headgear, which she had put on last, was a bit different from her usual one.

“No matter how powerful our magic is, it’s neither invincible nor almighty. That’s the main reason why we, the witches, have a hard time during battles.”
“That’s true. Once the humans charge at us with their wave tactics, it’s next to impossible for us to win against their armies.”
“Still, if we can capitalize on each individual’s magic and put them together, there’s a winning chance for us even against large human forces. I’ve always thought that way, and surprisingly, my belief was proven during the previous battle at the Schweiz River. That’s why I took an interest in the Dragon King. It may be possible that that man’s presence will bring together the long since scattered witches.”

Elysione, who finished changing Vita's clothes, looked up at her mother.

"Is that…. so?"
"It can't be said for certain, but it's definitely hard for the witches to stand at the summit as they are, and even more for a human. However, he is neither a witch nor a human. He's the rumored Dragon King who fell from another world. If that's true, perhaps those highly proud witches would also acknowledge him as someone who stands above them? Actually, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Harrigan & the rest are already under that guy's command."

"Indeed, it seems to be so. That being the case, could it be that Mother feels inclined to fight alongside the Dragon King as the supreme commander against the humans?"

Saying that, Elysione began to move her hands again.

"It may be that I'm also curious about fighting humans, but the fact that that guy's presence could muster the famous witch clans is what really caught my interest. Provided the witches band together and work as one, taking on an army of 1000 or 2000 people will become easy enough. Even so, that alone is one of the biggest hurdles."
"Exactly. It's said it has already been more than several hundred years since the country of the witches collapsed. Throughout that time, nobody has managed to reunite the witches, right?"

"Perhaps, that Dragon King will become the key to our breakthrough. What's more—"

While getting dressed, Vita smiled with satisfaction.

"Right now, he's acting together with Harrigan's clan, but it should be fine even if we strip them of the Dragon King and tempt him to join us. Assuming that happens, wouldn't it be possible for him to become our King at the time the new world is established?"
"Wow, Mother, those are indeed words worthy of a scoundrel, aren't they?"

Vita threw a glance at Elysione.

"Ah, no, whether Mother becomes a scoundrel or a cowardly person, we are prepared to follow you til the end, so you don't have to worry."
"Being followed til the end by a simpleton like you is what I'm most anxious about, you see.",
"T…That's mean."

Elysione warped her face tremendously.

"Well then, this much should do."

Still – Vita, who finished changing her clothes, said so while looking frequently at her daughter.

“That man, what is the Dragon King going to say once he finds out we are naked under your mantle?”
“Eh? Ah, I, I wonder about that. Perhaps, he will insist that we show him the inside of the mantle.”
“Moreover, he might insist on teleporting with us upon learning about us becoming naked.”

“Aghh, it would be a disgusting offer, wouldn’t it? Still, it looks to be something that man is be capable of, I guess.”

Fu – Vita slightly laughed

“When that happens, teleport together with the Dragon King and show him the might of your power.”

Elysione warped her face and recoiled in aversion.

“Eeeeeeh? Things like taking along a naked man, I won’t agree to that. Wouldn’t I show him my naked body before even being able to show him my magic?”
“You too will be able to see him naked, so there should be mutual gains for both sides. No, since the two of you will cuddle to each other when teleporting, rather than just seeing each other, you will also be able to feel each other’s skin. Aren’t you glad?”
“Not at all!”
“Kukuu. Well, I was just kidding, you see. Then, shall we go? The Dragon King-dono is probably waiting for us.”

3

“Achooo”
“What’s the matter, Naga? Did you catch a cold?”
“No… can you really say it’s due to chills? Somehow, I’ve got an incredibly bad feeling about something, but….”

Naga looked around the room, but nevertheless, there was nothing particularly distinctive. Because a meeting regarding the assessment of their forces was about to begin, almost everyone involved had gathered.

“Vita and Elysione are still absent, right?”

As soon as Naga muttered, Harrigan responded.

“It appears they have just recently arrived here, so they should probably show up soon.”

Following her words, Vita and Elysione appeared shortly thereafter inside the room where everyone had gathered.
Naga was a bit worried about other witches directing their rude gazes at the two of them, but it wasn't the right time for prying into that matter.

Once Naga waited for Vita and Elysione to reach their seats, he began the meeting.

"Excellent. Since everyone has gathered, let's start the assessment."

4

"Well then, I think we are finally close to deciding on everyone's deployments today."

Saying so, Naga looked around to the faces of all present witches.

The ones who were present on Harrigan's side were Harrigan herself, Ais, Lela, Kay, Nonoel, and Yuuki.

Whereas Vita's side included herself, Elysione, and three witches named Lilly, Dora, and Samplotte. However, unlike the first two, the other three had run through the forest instead of moving through the mantle.

The witch whose name was Samplotte didn't reach Elysione's height, but she was also tall and strongly built.
On the other hand, the one called Lilly had a physique no different from a child, and her face also left an impression of her being innocent.
One more person, named Dora, had womanly features appearing throughout her large body, which gave her a bewitching aura.
Combining all of them, the 10 witches, together with Naga, sat on folding chairs while forming a circle.
Naga pushed out a map lying on the floor in front of everyone. It was a map of the Schweiz River area that had become the battlefield during their last battle.

"A single troop from Kasandora Kingdom's army has been assigned to watch over the place near the crossing of the river. According to Raibach, they are a company under his direction that consists of 100 soldiers. There doesn't seem to be any major change among them since their captain was kidnapped by the witches, I guess. Perhaps, their vice-captain picked up the leadership of the company. Even though their captain is missing, there's no sign of them receiving reinforcements."

As he said so, Naga put a wry smile on his face.

"It looks like Kasandora Kingdom doesn't care about its captain's fate, and continues to maintain its status quo…… right? After all, this troop is just disposable. Despite that, it will be troublesome to have them stationed at the riverbank."

Using his index finger, Naga specified a point on the map.

First, we should consider what to do with this troop, but…"
"Since there's only a hundred of them, how about we take a detour?"

Vita asked.

"True. It should be fine for us to cross even without having to face them directly."

Saying that, Samplotte expressed her opinion.

"I too think so, but Naga, isn't it just you who see them as a problem?"

Once Harrigan stated her consent, Naga nodded in agreement.

"If possible, I'd like to have this troop escape."
"I see, I see. So Dragon King wants to make sure that this troop doesn't flank us when we are in the middle of capturing Fort Ein, right?"
"That's what I mean. I don't want to kill them due to my fundamental policy, so it should do as long as we cripple them as a troop by making them run away. Even if some of them were to return, they wouldn't dare to threaten our back upon seeing the witches capturing the fort."

"I see. That's indeed a kind of story one would imagine seeing. Still, aren't you pretty used to wars?"

Indeed, it may appear so – Naga nodded in agreement as soon as Vita asked him with a face filled with admiration.

"That's because my thoughts will naturally gush out whenever it comes to things like this. However, since I've no memories, I can't tell exactly what kind of experience I had back then, you see."
"Shouldn't it be more reasonable for you not to know how to fight? Just how deeply is your world stained with war?"

Vita's expression turned into an astonished one.

"Well, I wonder about that."

As if mocking himself, Naga wore a smile that gave a somewhat gruesome impression.

"Certainly, it feels like the world where I used to live had endless wars, but…. well, isn't that fine? More importantly, let's focus on our talk."
"That's right. We don't have much spare time, so we better sort things out and start making the necessary preparations. Otherwise, it won't do, you see."

Vita nodded.

“Then, in order to scatter the troop that guards the river here, I’d like us to form a group for long-range attacking; still….”

Naga, who pointed once more on the map, lifted up his head and looked at Ais.

“Since this will become essential for us when capturing the fort, let me ask you something, Ais. How far can you throw using cobbles?”
“Cob, bles?”
“Were they called cobbles, or maybe, pebbles? I mean those hand-sized stones.”

Ais showed an attitude of pondering for a short while.

“Right. I think it would be around 11-13.5 meters under normal circumstances, and around 270 meters with my strengthened body, but…”

Naga measured the distance with his own senses.

“…..Wha, 270 meters?! You are able to throw them that far?!”

270 meters is certainly a long distance.

“Yes, if it’s a hand-sized stone, then most likely.”

(Even if they’re just stones, it does indeed require a terrific strength to be able to throw them such a distance. I should expect no less from a human battering ram, or perhaps, a human cannon…..hm? Cannon….Gun…..)

“Is there something you want to say, Naga-san?”
“Ah?”

Raising up his head, Naga’s sight met Ais, who looked at him with a smiling face. Despite that, her eyes didn’t smile at all, which was frightening.

Naga hurriedly waved with his hands in front him.

“No. No no, there’s nothing.”
“Is that so? I guess that’s fine, but…”
“If you are able to throw that far, can I have you become the core of the long-range assault against the troop guarding on the other side of the river?”

Paying attention so as not to meet with her eyes, Naga pointed at the river on the map.

Lela, who held a brush, wrote in Ais’ name near the river.

“And then…. Lela.”
“Wh-at?”

Lifting up her face, Lela directed her sight at him.

“How far can you launch those fireballs using your magic?”
“As one would expect, it will be hard for me to deal with that distan-ce. Nevertheless, Provided Yuuki carries my charms, it should be possible for them to be dropped onto the enemy’s hea-ds.”

Lela, who replied like that, shifted her gaze at Yuuki.

“I’m fine with that, but, if that happens, wouldn’t Lela’s charms burn down the enemy, were they to touch them?”

(No, you’d most likely be content with that.)

Naga wanted to retort that way, however, he refrained from doing so as it would worsen the situation.

“I’d appreciate it if you could do your best so as not to let the charms come into contact with them.”

Is where Naga stopped his comment at.

On the other hand, Yuuki puffed her cheeks in displeasure.

“Because they will be dropped from above, such a detailed stunt is next to impossible, right?”
“Since the charms are just supposed to fall and burn, it will take a while for them to descend complete-ly. The enemy soldiers should be able to avoid them in ti-me.”

Lela gave him a hand as a last resort.

“Is that so? Indeed, if that’s the case, there’s no need for us to worry much about that matter.”

Nodding down at once, Naga turned around to Yuuki and lightly bowed down at her.

“Anyway, I’m relying on you, Yuuki.”
“Uh….Geez, I got it. I’ll do it properly.”
“With that, Lela and Yuuki will participate as a single gro-up.”

Lela, who casted down her eyes, added her own and Yuuki’s name on the map.

“Is, there anyone else here who can carry a long-range attack?”

As he questioned Harrigan, she crossed her arms while slightly grumbling.

“Umu. As expected, it’s indeed difficult when it comes to an attack that covers a range of as much as 270 meters.”

Following that, she looked in Vita’s direction.

“How about your side?”
“I guess you’re right. A long-range attack like that is quite a tough task, but, with Elysione here, stabbing an enemy’s back would be simple, wouldn’t it?”

Naga moved his eyes toward Elysione.

She was dressed in her mantle even when sitting on a folding stool. Naga became curious about what kind of attire she was wearing under that mantle of hers.

(To begin with, since the witches from Sraymeyer are supposed to wear thin clothes with lots of exposure, just like Harrigan and the rest, perhaps Elysione has such garments as well.)

Elysione, who was unaware of Naga’s thoughts, nodded with a serious face.

“So long as I can place my mantle in advance, it’s perfectly fine. Assuming we lay a mantle on the other side of the river under cover of night and choose the right time to fly at our own discretion, it will look as though we are suddenly ambushing the enemy.”
“Despite saying so, you can only carry one person with you each time, right?”
“True. What’s more, there’s also the problem of appearance when transporting a person, but if that part is arranged beforehand as well, it should probably be fine.” (?)

“What’s…..the meaning of that?”

Is it okay for me to explain? – Elysione looked at Vita as if asking for her permission.

“It can’t be helped.”

Once she heard Vita’s reply, Elysione made a mild cough.

“In other words, you see, I can only fly through the mantle with my body. That’s to say, I can’t fly through it if I’m wearing clothes.”
“Wha….t?”

Naga run his eyes over Elysione’s whole body.

“Then does it mean, you’re, not wearing anything under your mantle?”
“Yes, when it’s not winter, I’m basically nude”
“Oi oi, why didn’t you tell me such an important thing sooner?”

Naga smacked his lips slightly and repeatedly.

“Had you told me about it sooner, I would’ve come and worshipped you every time you arrived….. No, rather than that, won’t you fly into my arm…..”

Chop!
Whack!

Such sounds bursted forth as Naga’s head was hit from behind by Harrigan’s solid hair and chopped on his forehead by Ais’ karate chop at the same time.

“Awwwwwwwwwwww!”

Holding the back of his head with his right hand and his forehead with his left hand, Naga tumbled on top of the floor.

Haa – Lela exhaled a sigh.
Aren’t you an idiot? – Yuuki threw out such words.
Whereas, Kay cackled with her raised up voice.

Vita’s side watched Naga with dumbfounded faces. Naturally, only Vita herself and Elysione nodded in agreement with a face indicating this was a natural course of action.

“I was just joking. Don’t hit me like that while taking my jokes seriously, geez.”

Naga, who had teary eyes, said so while objecting to Harrigan and Ais.

“It didn’t look like your expression was telling us so?”
“On the contrary, it was incredibly serious?”
“You girls are….”

snap – While stroking the back of his head using his right hand, Naga pointed at them with his left hand’s index finger.

“Saying such an irresponsible thing, what will you do if a rumor spreads out inside Vita’s clan?!”

“Because it’s more truth than rumor, it can’t be helped?”
“Indeed, it can’t be helped.”
“Good grief. Those girls are seriously…”

Naga grabbed his head.

“Dragon King. We understand very well you’re a genuine pervert. More importantly, shouldn’t we continue this urgent strategy meeting?”

snap – Naga immediately snapped once more time and pointed at Vita.

“Don’t understand! And by the way, it’s a misunderstanding!”
“You mean it? If it’s a misunderstanding, then good. Leaving that aside, aren’t we going to finish this talk quickly? After all, we didn’t come here to fool around.”
“Ah, sorry that.”

Naga, who regained his composure, pressed his hand against the map and resumed their previous talk.

“Ummm, in addition to Ais who’s the part of the long-range assault group, Lela and Yuuki will join up. Other than that, we are going to capitalize on Elysione’s ability of instant travel, send in someone to the other side of the river, and have that person take the enemy from behind. Whom should we appoint for that task….?”
“Ummm…”

Nonoel lifted up her hand with restraint.

“What, Nonoel?”
“If we assault the enemy from behind, won’t they get the wrong idea of being surrounded by their enemy, thus resorting to desperate actions?”

That’s right – Naga once again casted down his eyes on the map while slightly groaning.

“Certainly, I can’t rule out that possibility. If by any chance a part of the enemy tries to break through in that state, they might happen to rush toward Elysione and the rest.”

As Naga was pondering, Vita intercepted.

“If it’s Elysione, she can take on 10, 20 people with no bigger problem. However, were that to happen, it would result in a battle no matter what, and eventually lead to casualties among the enemy soldiers.”
“I guess you’re right. Then, is it a bad idea to attack the enemy from behind?”
“Naga-san, how about me hiding inside the river water like previously?”

Naga looked at Nonoel with a surprised expression.

“Ah? Ahh, is that so?”
“I’ll enter the river from upstream, swim down it to the actual place, and wait on standby. Once Ais and the rest start their assault, I’ll threaten the enemy with my water magic. Firing some water spears should be enough to drive them away, I think, but…”
“I see. Using that method, even those trying to hold their ground will be scared off. That’s a good guarantee.”

Rather than just having his subordinates follow his orders, Naga appreciated those who could think and devise a plan on their own. That's why, he greatly welcomed such a proposition.

Naga faced Nonoel and gave her the thumbs up.

"You came up with a great idea, Nonoel."

Nonoel scratched her head while making an embarrassed grin.

"I, It isn't a big deal, still….it's somewhat of a deal."

"She's casually boasting of herself?!"

Both Kay and Yuuki bent a little backwards.
On the other hand, Naga's expression turned a bit serious, as if being concerned by something.

"Surely, it's a great idea, but Nonoel, aren't you afraid of being spotted? If you were to be discovered, they would most likely attack you."
"As long as I'm under the river, I can make myself hardly noticeable to the outside thanks to my magic. And once Ais and the rest commence their attacks, I don't think the enemy will even consider watching over the river."
"So you're going to be all right? Then, let it be."

Naga pointed at a single point of the Schweiz River on the map.

"I guess, Nonoel will station here."

Lela wrote in Nonoel's name on the map.

"In case the enemy doesn't escape, it should be totally fine to pull a trick by showing them how numerous we are, but…"

Saying that, Naga turned his eyes in Harrigan and Vita's direction.

"That much should probably do."
"Umu, I see no problem."
"If they do, we will just stick to our plan. What's left to do are small and detailed matters, such as the deployment of the witches and things that we need to prepare."

Like that, Naga and the witches concluded the preparatory meeting and tied up the last details of their strategy for capturing Ein fort.

The next day, both the Heindler and Sraymeyer clans advanced with their preparations.

And then, 10 days later.
The day for capturing the fort had finally arrived.
Ais, Kay, Naga, and Raibach approached near the right riverbank.
Even though the chance for the enemy to launch their arrows was slim, Kay, who took charge of protecting the others, was prepared for that instance.
Since Raibach wore a mantle and covered his face with a cloth, the enemy soldiers would perhaps not recognize him.

The reason why Raibach went to the frontline was due to him wanting to make sure of his troop.

“Going to the frontline carries a risk, you know.”

Naga stopped at this single warning, but nevertheless, Raibach doggedly opposed.

“No, you are going there as well, aren’t you? If so, it shouldn’t be that dangerous.”
“That’s because there are witches who will protect me. Still, in your case, they might not have enough hands, you see.”
“Well, when that comes, I’ll somehow manage it by myself.”
“If you’re fine with that, then I shall bring you with me. I do understand your feeling of wanting to see your subordinates safe.”

Like that, Naga brought Raibach with him after exchanging such a conversation.
Raibach’s sense of responsibility strengthened Naga’s belief about him being able to place his trust in Raibach.

A little distance behind Naga and Ais, there were Lela, Harrigan, and Vita waiting.
Just now, Yuuki who received Lela’s charms soared into the sky on her board.
Noticing a witch drawing near, the enemy troop that was guarding on the other side of the river started to make an uproar.

Naga, Ais, Kay, and Raibach, who were carrying baskets on their back put them down on the ground.
The inside of the baskets were overflowing with cobble.
A part of the troop, which noticed the quickest, climbed up the embankment and began shooting arrows. Nonetheless, due to a great distance separating both sides, the arrows would eventually land quite far in front of Naga and the rest.
Naga, who deemed they couldn’t be threatened by the enemy’s arrows, ordered his side to attack.

“Excellent, do it, Ais!”

Holding a cobble in her right hand, Ais raised her left leg overhead and bent her right arm.

Adding to her raised left leg, Ais' right arm swung sharply forward together with her body.

Gohyuuu. – The cobble continued to fly with a sound tearing through the air.

Leaving a small gap, the cobble splashed on the surface near the opposite shore.
Ais, who finished the throw, regained her posture and measured the landing distance.

"Hm, I think just a little more."

Muttering that, she grabbed another cobble

Byufuuu.

Again, the sound of tearing the air reverberated.
This time, a single cloud of dust appeared on the slope of the embankment.

"Ohhhh, Ais, that was a splendid throw."

Soon after Naga raised an astonished voice, Kay clapped her hands.

"The enemy, they look surprised, surprised!"
"Ais, continue your throws just like that. If possible, aim for spots which are less crowded by soldiers."

"Yes, I got that, but, it's not achievable for me to aim without hitting any soldier, you know?"
"It can't be helped, right? Raibach too, would probably not wish for that to happen."

Ais took a short glimpse at Raibach's direction.

"It should be enough as long you're considerate."

Hearing his reply, Ais felt relieved and picked up another cobble.

"Then, I shall continue."

The cobbles continued to cut through the air with no intervals.

Paa, Paa, Paa – clouds of dust rose up here and there.

Even from this great distance, one could understand that the soldiers began to panic.
Since the cobble flew and sunk with a terrific power into the slope's surface, it was guaranteed that the soldiers would consider them a life-threatening danger, were they to hit.

Should they fight back? Perhaps, with their arrows not reaching their target, it should better for them to escape? The soldiers loitered around, being unable to reach a conclusion.
At that time, Yuuki, who took a detour, drew near with her hoverboard above their heads.
Noticing her charms being scattered by Yuuki, Lela began to cast a chant.
Following that, the charms began to flare up at once in the air.

Yuuki left the scene at full speed.
Looking up at a bunch of flames floating down from the air, the soldiers began to scream loudly.
Meanwhile, clouds of dust continued to appear on the slope's surface.
Just when the enemy soldiers broke up in confusion, a large wave built up on the surface of the river.
Its height exceeded more than 3 meters. Despite its size being unusual, what was strange about the wave was that it elevated on the spot, instead of battering the shore. The large wave looked as though it was the neck of a water dragon that emerged from the water. As the neck started to move left and right in a manner if searching for its prey, the enemy soldiers were no longer able to endure. They threw away their bows and dodged each other while aiming for the opposite side of the embankment.

Immediately after that, the top of the embankment became clear of any soldier.

"Ais, just to make sure, I'd like you to make the cobble reach a bit further, near the other side of the embankment."

Naga, Ais, Kay, and Raibach who were carrying the baskets on their backs covered a distance of more than 54 meters, after which they put down their baskets again.
Once more, Ais began to throw with the cobble.
No clouds of dust could be seen as the bank intercepted their view, however, it was certain, the cobble reached beyond the bank. Provided there were still some soldiers left, they would probably not wish to stay there any longer.

As the four of them continued to progress, the group that waited behind them moved too.
With his doubt of any possible arrow attack being cleared away, Naga summoned Selena and made her check the other side of the shore using her magic- Heaven's Eye(?).

"It's safe. At least, there's no sign of enemy soldiers near the left bank."

Excellent! – Naga clapped his hands after hearing her response.

"It's just how I imagined. With this, a part of the guarding troop will run back to Ein Fort and inform their comrades about an attack coming from the witches. Ais, you can stop throwing cobble now."

Being called out by Naga, Ais released the cobble in her hand and took a deep breath.

“As one would expect, even throwing constantly with all of your strength will make you a bit exhausted, won’t it?”

(Firing cobble in rapid succession at more than 270 meters, you call that a bit?)

“Is something wrong?”
“No, I just wanted to say ‘good work’.”
“I’m glad I was able to fulfill my duty.”

Ais made a pleasant smile.
Just then, Yuuki returned on her hoverboard.

“Yuuki!”
“What?”
“We’re going to cross the river. We can confirm the situation using Selena’s Heaven’s Eye, but just to be on the safe side, can you go ahead and check the opposite bank for us?”

“Well, if I’m told to do something, then I’ll do it.”

Once she stated so while hovering a little over a meter above the ground, Naga suddenly bowed down.

“I beg you, please do it.”
“Whaaa?!”

Yuuki, who bent backwards, nearly fell off from her board.

“You’re gross, so stop it! Speaking of which, don’t surprise people like that! What will you do if someone falls off because of that?!”
“No, no matter how you look at it, I can’t think of anyone dying from that height. To begin with, I only lowered my back and made a kind request. To think you would be startled by something like this, just what’s wrong?”
“I’m saying that such an attitude, doesn’t suit you.”

Saying that over her shoulder, Yuuki rose up and left on her board.
Naga, who smiled wryly, called out to Ais, Kay, and Selena.

“Let’s move to the other side.”

Naga & Co. progressed to the right bank while paying attention to their surroundings.
Immediately after, Harrigan and the others followed.

A group consisting of Naga and more than 10 witches linked up with Nonoel, who was waiting inside the river, and quickly proceeded to the left bank on the other side.
Nobody from the witches had received a single scratch, and no fallen soldiers were found.

One could say that Naga's plan of capturing the fort without yielding any casualty was going smoothly.

7

The capture of Ein Fort was within hailing distance.
During that time, the soldiers who escaped back to the fort relayed the information about their patrol troop being scattered by the witches and about the enemy's probable attempt of crossing over the river. Upon learning about that, the guards of Ein Fort partially fell into panic, however, not even Naga could have foreseen that far. Despite saying so, Selena was able to confirm some of the guards located at a watchtower becoming restless.

(Looks like we won't have to seize all the enemy soldiers. Even apprehending half of them should probably be enough to make the rest run away on their own.)

Is what Naga thought.

Just as he predicted, they managed to clear out the north side of the fort.
So as to inform other companions about this part being clear, as well as to show off to their enemy, Naga and the rest hoisted a blatant flag that was prepared beforehand.
The flag had a pattern drawn on it that was once used for the united kingdom of the witches.
With the flag depicting the forces of the witches being supposedly visible, there's no doubt about their enemy considering that as a deployment of the witches.

(The strategy this time is especially difficult, isn't it? Still, the wind is already blowing in our favor. I see no other option than to attack the fort and take it down just as we planned. Yet if a problem arises, will we be able to seize the fort without producing any sacrifice? I guess this is what worries me the most.)

Naga and the rest of the witches took their posts and waited for the right chance.

8

Ais launched her attack of cobble throwing, whereas Yuuki carried Lela's charms on her hoverboard atop Ein fort.
As they were attracting the guards' attention, Kay, who used that momentum to solidify her body, run up to the fort's walls while wearing a mantle and holding a shield for protecting against arrows.
The reason why Kay held the shield even though she could reach the place without getting harmed was so as to keep the arrows away from Elysione, who would be defenseless while she was coming out of the mantle. Nevertheless, it was a needless worry as the enemy soldiers came off the fort's watchtower without trying to shoot down the running Kay, and escaped inside. There was also a chance that most of those soldiers left the fort behind.

"That's, a big letdown, isn't it?"

Muttering those words, Kay put down the shield and spread out the mantle she was entrusted with by Elysione on the ground.
The location of that was right at the bottom middle of the wall near the east side of the fort.
Kay, who stood up, raised her shield overhead just to ensure there was no attack coming.
Following that, the top of Elysione's head, which stuck out from a hole, began to rise gradually.

"Yuck! It really looks like as though you're welling up. Indeed, an obscene magic."

Because Elysione, whose face was half submerged, gazed at Kay with a glaring look, the latter averted her eyes hurriedly.
Taking the opportunity of that, Kay looked around.

As one would expect, there was not a single sign of the enemy in the surroundings.

(Should you say it's a letdown or no response coming from the enemy? Well, still, they were done in by us previously, so perhaps, this is just bound to happen. I see, this is what Naga-san meant by saying 'The wind is already blowing in our favor. Capturing the fort might turn out unexpectedly quick'. At first, I was only half-convinced about that, but, seeing how smoothly this plan is going, it appears that person was right.)

Kay had been taught that the result of a battle didn't just amount to the battlefield.
Depending on the winning side and losing side, further battles would be affected as well.

At the time Kay was looking aside, Elysione continued to rise up little by little from the inside of her mantle.
Finally, once the top of her head reached higher than Kay's, she stopped ascending. In other words, Elysione's body fully appeared from the inside of the mantle. That being said, Vita's appearance also emerged from the inside.

thud – While Kay was putting herself on guard, a shock ran through her body.

"…! So heavyy."

Kay, who threw away her shield tried to keep the balance of her several times heavier body by putting more strength into her feet. however, being unable to stand firmly, she kneeled down on one knee.

What came next were voices of screaming and anger heard from the guards, from the fort's interior. Nevertheless, they quickly turned into sounds of groaning.

"Even though we made thorough preparations, it's still messy like this? Still, there's no doubt… about the soldiers inside being….. unable to move."

In fact, it happened just like that.
As soon as Yuuki watched from the above of the fort, she noticed every single soldier lying

on the ground. Some of them were crawling, others – lying on their belly, and yet, other ones – lying face up.

One could see them struggling while trying to move their bodies, but nonetheless, far from being able to stand up, the soldiers had a hard time even crawling.

Yuuki clapped her hands and laughed without realizing it.

“Somehow, it looks like birds being trapped in birdlime.”

As far as she could see from above, there were no soldiers standing and moving.

“Well then, eat this!”

Rapidly descending down on her board, Yuuki tossed something above the heads of the soldiers who were lying in a crowd.
The thing she had released spread out in the air and continued to fall on top of the soldiers.

“Uwaa, what’s this?!”
“A, a net?”

What spread out greatly from overhead was a solidly knitted net.
Crawling on all fours while desperately fighting against their weight, the soldiers could neither ward off or pass through the net. Even if they tried to crawl out from under it, the net would just wind together.

Yuuki moved to the next spot and released another net in the same manner

With the number of enemy entwined in nets increasing, the open space in the fort’s interior became buried with soldiers that were unable to move. the situation looked as though miserable fishes were caught in a big haul and pulled up on land.

Yuuki flew out of the fort and returned back to others, who were waiting upon outside the range of Vita’s magic. There, she picked up Nonoel and hovered again.

“Two people riding is surely quite the load. It makes my control of wind more complicated, and thus, harder to launch the hoverboard.”

As she complained while desperately trying to operate the hoverboard, Nonoel, who was holding onto Yuuki’s waist, apologized.

“I’m sorry.”
“No, it’s not that bad since you’re quite light. Were it to be Ais, it would be much more troublesome. I would probably be unable to hov…..”

Kooo!

The board swayed from a shock caused by something passing next to them with a frightening power.

“Eeeekk?”

Yuuki, who somehow managed to keep the balance of the board, raised up her eyes and looked around, after which, she noticed Ais’ appearance entering her view. Ais, who had just finished her throw, regained her posture.

“Wait, Ais, what are you doing?! If I get hit with a cobble, won’t my hoverboard turn into dust and splinters?!”

Yuuki let her voice as if objecting.

“Yuuki, Nonoel, do your best, okay?!”

With a smile on her face, she waved her left hand. However, Nonoel couldn’t overlook another cobble in Ais’ right hand.

Nonoel who broke into a cold sweat tapped Yuuki’s back.

“Y, Yuuki, escape fas….no, let’s fly over the, fort and finish our task.”
“R, Right!”

Yuuki controlled the unsteady board and moved back above the fort.
Nonoel, who looked down at the scene below, raised her voice in admiration.

“Uwaa, Vita-san’s magic is, amazing, isn’t it?”

The top of the ground was full of soldiers putting up a resistance and struggling in vain, trying to move themselves hopelessly, despite being entwined in nets.

“Don’t just admire, quickly do what you’re supposed to! I have a hard time controlling this board with the two of us!”
“Ah, understood. I’ll do it right away.”

As Nonoel was forming an incantation, moisture started to gather in the air.
And a rain fell constantly without having to wait long.
Once the sky was filled with enough rain to soak the ground, Yuuki returned with her board and put Nonoel down. After that, she gave a ride to one of the witches from Sraymeyer’s clan, named Lilly, hovered back to her previous spot.

9

Yuuki felt a bit anxious as she had no experience in transporting other witches. However, because Lilly had a small physique, steering the board wasn’t as difficult as what she had

initially thought.
The moment they both reached their destination, Lilly began to chant her incantation while clapping her hands numerous of times.

“The hand whose god’s words echoes, the radiance born from the god. Prostrate, prostrate. Shine, become angry, run down. Oh furious God of thunder, pass down your judgement on this hill, pass it down on this hill. Come, come, come.”

And then,
A small flash of lightning ran down from the sky into the ground.

“Gyaaaaaaa”

Screams and shouts coming from electrocuted soldiers echoed here and there.
the flash of lighting kept running down numerous times.
And each time, a scream would be raised.
In addition to every soldier wearing metal armor and being soaked with rain created by Nonoel, not a single one of them could avoid getting electrocuted.
After the very last flash, not a single soldier seemed to be moving.

Yuuki waved with her hand so as to give a signal to others.
Kay, who saw that while stretching out her neck, shouted.

“Vita-san, it seems to be over!”

Shortly thereafter, Kay could suddenly sense her body becoming light again. Despite that, she had the feeling her body lost half of its weight.

“Uwaa, my body feels lighttt.”

Feeling that she was able jump over the wall, Kay leaped with all her might. Unfortunately, her body didn’t reach even 1.35 meters.

“As expected, my body returned back to its original weight, eh?”

Once she muttered so, Kay approached Elysione and brought a mantle, the hem of which she coiled into a roll.

“Vita-san, here.”

What Kay held out toward her was a small sized, makeshift mantle for Vita who stayed inside Elysione’s mantle to bear with for the time being.(?)

“I appreciate your efforts.”

Vita, who reached out her hands and received the mantle, creeped inside of it.
At that time, Elysione stood around with a stern expression, making it seem weird to Kay.

Finally, as Vita finished putting it on her, she crawled out from Elysione's mantle.

The little witch adjusted her breathing and turned around to Elysione.

"Well then, you can go now, Elysione."
"Yes, Mother!"

Elysione placed her foot on Vita's held out palms and made a big leap.
It looked like the petite Vita wouldn't be able to throw her largely built daughter into the air; nevertheless, Elysione gently whirled up into the sky as though she had feathers and jumped over the wall.

"Wow, incredible!"
"Do you want to leap as well?"
"Is that okay with you? Aren't you tired?"
"My power won't be exhausted by this much."
"Is that so? In other words, is it fine for me to harden my body just like this?"
"I don't mind. Jump on my palms."
"Well then, I'm going"

Kay, who was about to leap with all her might touched Vita's palms with the back of her heels.
Soon after that, she could truly feel her body rapidly losing its weight. No, rather than 'rapidly losing', it felt more like it had no weight at all.
Moving her palms casually, Vita released Kay into the air.
And her body floated high into the air.

Soaring high in the air like this, Kay wondered whether or not she was dreaming.
Obviously, shortly after she passed over the wall, Kay's body returned to its original weight just like an illusion.
Vita's magic can reduce one's body weight, however, as soon the effect runs out, the weight will return to its previous state.

"Ooopps"

Kay adjusted her posture in a hurry and prepared for the landing.
Since she could feel her weight returning back gradually, rather than spontaneously, there didn't…. seem to be any worry about Kay crashing headfirst against the ground.
Holding the ground firmly with the back of her heels, Kay absorbed the impact from the landing by folding her knees.
By the time she extended her legs, her body weight had returned back completely.

"Hmm, this is….. a somewhat enjoyable magic indeed."

Kay, who thought about that optimistically looked around her surroundings.
There were soldiers lying everywhere in lumps. Several, or perhaps, a dozen of them, were trapped inside nets while being unconscious.

"It's most likely due to them being hit by thunderbolts."

Kay approached one of the soldiers and peeked inside his eyes. Without having to check, it was clear both his armor and clothes were wet.

"I guess it's because of them getting soak that the thunderbolts were so effective. It doesn't look like they're going to wake up anytime soon. Despite that, it will be trouble if they wake up by any chance, so, shouldn't I quickly make sure they don't?"

Kay took stakes attached to a net in her hand and knocked them into the ground using her hardened fist.

Once she plugged them deeply into the ground on all 4 sides of the net, Kay stood up and checked its firmness by pulling.

"Hm, I think it's okay. Even if some of these soldiers wake up and struggle, they shouldn't be able to come out."

Moving from net to net, she continued to fix them with stakes.

While she was doing so, the other witches also crossed over the fort's walls one after another and began to go around its interior in small groups.

“Thanks for your hard work, Kay.”

Kay turned around at Ais’ praise.

Today, because their plan was to embark on Ein fort, Ais put on leather armor on top of her thin garments as it had a lower effect on her magic than metal armor. Even if it was true, the leather armor merely covered the minimum number of places, revealing as much of her skin as usual.

Will that really increase her protection? – The first time Naga saw that armor, he wanted to retort unintentionally that way.

(Back in my world, people would supposedly go to the battlefield…. fully armored. Certainly, this feels off somehow. Well, it’s probably still better than wearing nothing, so…)

But considering that matter again, Naga restrained himself from retorting.

“Ais, you did a great job too, right?!”
“It appears that the remaining soldiers have already made off from the fort, doesn’t it? The exploration of this building isn’t over yet, but at least, I can’t spot any of them still moving.”
“How about Hari-nee and Naga-san?”
“We’ve just opened the gate, so they should be here soon, together with Raibach as well.”
“You mean it? Speaking of which,”

Kay looked frequently at Ais’ body.

“Ais, don’t tell me you also got over the wall thanks to Vita-san’s magic?”

Ais tilted her head while smiling cheerfully.

“Ara? Kay-chan, what do you mean by ‘don’t tell me’? I’m trying to figure out your ‘don’t tell me’, but, you don’t mean to say something like ‘No matter how strong Vita-san’s magic is, don’t tell me that someone as massive as Ais could fly through the air’, right?”

Kay realized her dull gaffe, however, it was too late to take it back. With her knees becoming wobbly, Kay shook her head energetically from side to side.

“O, o, o, o, o, o, obviously not. Not even for a moment did that idea cross my mind.”
“…Is that so? Then, what’s the meaning behind the ‘don’t tell me’ just now?”

Wrapping her right first with her left palm, Ais inserted more power into her left hand while making a grin. *knuckle knuckle* – the joints in her right hand’s fingers generated a loud sound like that.

“I, still need to put more stakes, so let’s talk some other time, okay….?”

Kay ran away from the place just like a startled hare.

As Ais stared at Kay's distancing back, Naga's voice reached Ais from her back.

"Yo Ais, good work."

Once she turned around, there were Naga and Harrigan standing there. Naga had his armor put on him, whereas, Harrigan used the same, small leather armor similar to Ais' one. Behind them, Raibach, who wore a mantle with his face covered with cloth, stood. It wasn't clearly visible due to the mantle, but, his hands were supposedly tied up. Originally, there should've probably been no need for worry as one couldn't feel the slightest intention of escaping coming from Raibach.

"Naga-san, and Ane-sama too, thank you for your hard work."

Soon after she replied like that, Harrigan nodded down as if being content.

"It looks like we nicely managed to capture the fort."
Right I wouldn't have thought it would be this easy. As expected of Naga-san's splendid tactic."

"It wasn't that much. That's because the flow of this battle was already decided. Reversely, the enemy was prepared to flee from the very beginning, so I didn't consider this plan to be that difficult."

(Being, able to read the flow of a battle is a feat that we, the witches, cannot recreate. However, in this man's case, pulling it off this lightly is something of a big deal.)

Harrigan greatly admired Naga inside her heart.

Not being aware of Harrigan's thoughts, Naga ran his eyes over Ais' whole body.

"More importantly, Ais, to think you would also be able to leap into the air thanks to Vita's…."

Ais suddenly stomped against the floor and pushed out her right hand with unnoticeable speed.

"magi-gubooabaah?!"

Her fist sunk into Naga's armor. Despite him wearing one, a large impact hit his stomach. As soon as Ais calmly withdrew her right hand, Naga fell down with a thud to both his knees. His lower back bent so much that his forehead almost touched the surface of the floor. While holding his stomach, Naga slightly groaned and said.

“W…What are you doing out of sudd…en”
“I have no idea.”

Ais puffed her cheeks in discontent and walked away at a brisk pace.

“O, Oi, Dragon King, are you alright?”

Raibach called out to him in a concerned tone, but Naga lifted up his right hand so as to calm him down.

“Yea… I’ll manage it somehow……”

Harrigan exhaled a big sigh.

“Naga, shouldn’t you be a bit more considerate toward girls?”
“No, that was just a little…. joke, but well.”
“That’s why, I’m telling you that the other party might interpret it like this if you intend to make jokes.”
“Y, You mean it? Got it. I shall be more careful from now on.”

Holding his stomach, Naga grit his teeth and stood up.

“Still, that girl, Ais, to think she would hit me this seriously.”

The moment he complained, Harrigan looked at him pitifully.

“Perhaps not. Were she to get serious, she would’ve probably made a hole in both your armor and stomach, or maybe, pulverize all the bones in your body”
“No… way. For real?”

Naga thought he should be more careful from now on.

“Let’s leave that matter aside. We’ve brought down the fort, so starting from today, it’s our property. Should we walk around and check out its interior?”

I guess you’re right – Naga took an extensive view and nodded down in agreement, but,

“…….no, before doing so, we should first remove the armaments from the apprehended soldiers. I’ll have the scouting group check the building, whereas the rest of the members will progress with the removal of the armaments.”
“And more precisely, how should we do it?”

“Firstly, we will gather everyone in a single spot and remove nets from them one by one. We’re going to take away the armaments from those who regain their consciousness before doing the same with unconscious ones. All the stuff will be carried and put in the open space before the gate. By the time we are done, those who have become aware of the

situation will try to escape on their own. As for the unconscious people, we will wake them up and tell them it's okay to flee. They will most likely do the remaining thing."

Harrigan furrowed her eyebrows and asked to confirm something.

"About the unconscious soldiers, shouldn't it be better to place them in front of the gate?"
"True, it might be faster for their informed comrades to call out to them. With that, the soldiers should actually learn they were spared and released by the witches. Okay then, Harrigan, won't you call others?"
"Understood. Lela!"

Nodding down deeply, Harrigan ordered Lela, who had tagged along with them, to raise a smoke signal.
Following that, a green-colored smoke arose from burned charms, after which the witches appeared in succession.

11

Naga and Harrigan gave quick instructions to the gathered witches from Harrigan's clan. Soon after, the clan of Sraymeyer joined in, after their leader arrived at Naga's spot, and helped with the removal of the enemy's armaments.
Several of the soldiers had already run away after regaining consciousness. On the other hand, the still unconscious ones were transported to the open space before the fort's gate using a cart brought from a warehouse. The one to pull it was obviously Ais, but, Naga decided to go through a bit of a trouble so as to motivate her.

Finally, being able to soothe Ais' anger and encourage her to pull the cart, Naga thought.

(Yes, being considerate is serious matter. Especially, toward girls.)

Such was his strengthened belief.

12

The time for commencement of the tactic took place in the morning; nonetheless, the sun was already heading west. It was still too early for dusk, and shadows of watchtowers and other buildings inside the fort were still of considerable length, however, it was quite dark.

A big and a small half-moon resurfaced on a blue sky, close to the ground, while shining with a dim light.
Naga's voice echoed through the open space located before the gate, at the north side of the fort.

"Oh, you guys are awoke? Once you regain your mobility it's okay for you to escape."

At his voice, some of the awake soldiers pointed their nervous sights at Naga, and then, looked around with a frightened expression. A dozen of the witches were surrounding them with the intention of guarding.
The soldiers trembled with fear as they felt they were caught by the witches.

“Oi, what’s the matter? I’m telling you it’s fine to escape. Speaking of which, it will be meddlesome if you don’t leave quickly.”

For some reason, an armored man was ordering them from atop a footstool in a self-important manner.

(Why is there a man among the witches?)
(Who’s that guy?)

The soldiers looked at each other’s face with a strange expression while whispering together.

“You don’t feel like running away? Then, shall you become slaves of the witches? Or perhaps, you would prefer to be sliced off here?”

The strange looking man pulled out his strange looking sword. At its sight, the soldiers came back to their senses and remembered their fear.

“Uwaaaaaaa!”

One of them stood up abruptly and ran off in a tumbling manner.
Following him, the rest of the soldiers who had regained their consciousness did the same one after another.
As this kept repeating, the number of the enemy reduced to half.
In the end, those remaining asleep would be waken up against their will by tapping and shaking, and set free as if being shooed away.
Only 20 people consisting of officers and vice-officers were left in the open space. Some of them who had been selected from the rest had their hands and legs bound together.
Classifying them as commanding officers was an easy task since Raibach was present there.
In front of the remaining people, Naga got on the footstool and raised his voice.
He sheathed his sword back into his scabbard, put down its tip on the footstool, and placed his hands together on the sword’s pommel.

“How about this, you scoundrels. You have probably learned of the witches’ strength, right? Now that you’re apprehended like this, it’s fine to say your lives are in hands of the witches.”

Eeek?! – Some of the soldiers raised a shriek and turned stiff.

“But, fret not. We won’t be taking away your lives!”

At Naga's loud and remarkable voice, the soldiers who tensed their bodies sighed with relief.

"Instead, we're going to set you free!"

Naga, who cut off his words here, looked out over their faces.
Once he confirmed all the soldiers were holding their breath while concentrating their gazes on him, Naga once again raised his voice loudly.

"The reason why you scoundrels are caught is the result of you trying to attack and dispossess the witches from their land. You could say you reaped what you sowed, but, the witches are merciful this time, and therefore, your foolish act shall be ignored. Got it? You bastards are saved thanks to the benevolent and compassionate witches! You better engrave that in your hearts! And then, once you have learned your lesson, don't you ever dare to fight them again!"

They watched Naga with a doubtful, or rather, a strange expression. Nevertheless, many of them nodded down enthusiastically.

"I'm going to release you at once. Does anyone have any questions?"

He observed them once more with his composed attitude. And then, a single soldier timidly lifted his hand.

"I allow you to speak. So, what do you want?"

As soon as Naga pointed the tip of his scabbard toward that person, the man straightened up with fear. However, he quickly pulled himself together and asked.

"Y…..You seem to be affiliated with the witches, but, just who on earth are you?"

Naga directed his cold gaze at the soldier who asked. Because of that, the man felt his body going numb and becoming sweaty.

"You're asking me who I am? That's a good question. I'm, well, I wonder about that, you see."

At his vague reply, the man darted his eyes about; nevertheless, Naga carried on.

"I don't exactly know who I am, but for now, I'm being referred to as this by the witches:"

Leaving a break in his speech, he continued.

"Naga [written as Dragon King]"

The soldiers exchanged looks with each other and buzzed noisily.

“I don’t care if you want to inquire who I am, but more importantly, shouldn’t you focus on how to return safely? Since we won’t give you back the confiscated weapons, you better be careful on your way back to your city so as not to encounter wild animals or bandits.”

Hearing Naga’s words, all of them came back to their senses.

“I will repeat it just once, but, make sure you remember this generous treatment as you won’t be forgiven the next time you’re caught. If that happens, you will probably have your stomach split open, your blood poured out, or your internal organs eaten while you are still alive. Got it!?”

“Eeek?!…”
“Understoodddd!”

The soldiers prostrated themselves with a pale face; nonetheless, Harrigan and the witches from her clan looked dissatisfied.
Drawing out his sword, Naga came near to the enemy.
Once he stood next to them who trembled with fear, Naga cut off ropes binding their limbs.
Having finished doing so, he pointed the tip of his sword toward the gate.

“Hey, you can go now.”

Despite him telling them, nobody moved with their body.
Is he going to slash me from behind the moment I try to escape? – is what they doubted.

“What’s wrong, aren’t you going to run away? If you bastards don’t want to, then perhaps we should work you to death as slaves of the witches….”

“Uwaaaaaa!”

A single person screamed loudly while dashing out. The remaining soldiers understood that as a sign and dashed off one after another.

Naga shouted behind their backs.

“If you return back safely, you may tell your families about how humane the witches are!”

However, it wasn’t clear whether or not his words reached their ears, as they all went at full speed toward the gate without looking behind, just like startled hares.
13
By the time the soldiers disappeared, Naga called together Harrigan and Vita.

“It’s regarding what we intend to do from now on, but……. speaking of which, even though we managed to capture the fort, why do you look this displeased?”
“I wonder if it’s not due to your way of speaking, Naga. With what you had said before, didn’t you give them the wrong impression about us?”

Harrigan gazed at him.
Her abundant, bluish black hair that wriggled in the air looked fearsome.

“Good grief. It’s not nice to speak about us in a way that makes us look like beasts sucking humans’ blood and eating their live flesh, you know?”

Vita was in bad mood as well.
Even if the witches got angry, their appearance shouldn’t have been enough for Naga to be as afraid as he was towards Harrigan right now. Nevertheless, having already learned how frightening their magic is, he hurriedly shook his hands in front of them.

“No no, I just told the soldiers a lie so as to make them feel scared. Look, don’t people say ‘the end justifies the means’?”
“…….Do they?”

Naga suddenly lost his self-confidence as both Harrigan and Vita looked at him with doubtful eyes.

“Eh? Umm yes…I believe this is what people used to say, but…”
“Is this a part of your lost memories?”
“It looks to be so, I guess. Sometimes, these sorts of proverbs will jump into my mind.”

Because he made a bit of a miserable face, neither Harrigan nor Vita felt inclined to press him any further. With that, Naga was released from a difficult situation.

“Then, what are you going to do now, Naga?”

Naga who sighed with a relief inside his heart first looked at both of them.

“We will survey the exterior. Selena will check the nearby surroundings, whereas, Yuuki will explore the main road. After all, I want to confirm whether or not all the soldiers managed to run away, or if some of them are still left hiding.”

“Umu, I’ll take care of the preparations.”

Harrigan replied.

“And after that, we should inspect the interior, especially, what’s inside the warehouse.”
“Fumu. Then, shall we entrust Ais with that task?”

Saying so, she turned around toward Ais.

“Yes, leave it to me”
“Is there anything else we need to do?”
“That’s right. There’s a chance that the Kasandora Kingdom will try to retrieve this place.

About that, we better strengthen this fort's defense. Still, I don't think it will happen any time sooner, so we don't have to worry for today."

"Naga, what are the chances for their army to come and strike at us?"

It felt as though some tension showed through in Harrigan's questioning voice.
Since Harrigan gave off that impression, it wasn't impossible for the witches around here to display anxiety and tension on their faces.

"Adding up their defeat at the Schweiz River, today as well, they were quickly deprived of their fort, you see. Is their commanding officer(General?) willing to carry out another battle? More importantly, will their soldiers feel inclined to fight? Considering those facts, I don't think they will quickly decide on recapturing this fort, you see."

After hearing his answer, some of the witches felt relieved.
Naga, who looked at them with a side glance, gave a warning.

"However, we can't rest assured. There are probably other enemies besides the Kasandora Kingdom, right?"

Fumu, indeed that's true. – Vita nodded in agreement.

"With them losing a majority of their war potential, it can also mean…. that other countries will move with ease."
"Sooner or later, I'd like to hear more about other sides' military strength in comparison with this one here."
"Umu, that's fine."
"We can tell you anytime."
"Well, enough of that. We have yet to do the most important thing for today."
"Oh? There's still something left?"
"Oi oi, Harrigan, don't tell me you've already forgotten. We are victorious, we've captured Ein fort without sustaining any damage. In that case, there's one thing we ought to do."

Harrigan and Vita looked at each other while wondering what it could be.
The witches around them also tilted their heads at Naga's words.

"Good grief, you surely are slow, aren't you?"

Naga, who shook his head, drew out his sword and raised it high.

"When it comes to this, we ought to shout from victory and hold a banquet!"
"Ohh, you mean that?"
"I see. Certainly, we can't omit this part."

Both Naga and Vita nodded in agreement, and other witches expressed their approval as they became radiant, clapped their hands, and stamped with their feet.

14

(Oh my, indeed, this person is a big fish. As expected of someone who's referred to as the Dragon King.)

While the witches were filled with enthusiasm, Raibach watched Naga with deep admiration on his face.

(Just as he said, they managed to capture the fort without producing any casualty on the side of the guards. Surely, he was neither boasting or making a random speech as a temporary measure.)

Being able to see lots of familiar faces escaping safely, Raibach felt a great relief and admiration. He was amazed and deeply astonished at Naga's actual leadership ability.

(Perhaps, this person is really capable of creating a world where both humans and the witches can live together. If such a world comes true, there may no longer be any harsh and miserable war, I guess.)

The face of his young child resurfaced in his mind.

(That's right. I wonder if we could save more pitiful children like her.)

Raibach, began to think he wanted to see a world like that.
Therefore, he also started to think if there was anything he could do.

15

The witches began to make merry, but as soon as Naga left some words to Harrigan, he took Raibach and moved together with him to a separate room.
One could say it was his method of being considerate so as not to spoil the fun of the witches and let them feel at home when there were no men around.

Sorry for this. – Having sensed his intention, Harrigan lowered her head.
Naga smiled and lifted his right hand.

"Don't fret. This won't be our last victory banquet. Rather, there will be plenty more occasions like this one, you see."

"I'll bring you some alcohol and appetizer."
"Oh, please do so."

Saying this, both Naga and Raibach left to a smaller room and prepared to drink in silence.

16

“Why, didn’t you run away?”

Naga threw such a question at Raibach while holding his wine cup filled with grape wine inside. However, since a moment ago, he would just limit himself with tasting it.
Naga restrained himself to this way of drinking, not due to him disliking the taste, but because of him being aware he was weak towards alcohol.
On the other hand, Raibach emptied his metal wine cup many times, as if being good at drinking.

“No, asking me why is…”

Putting down the wine cup on the floor, Raibach looked at Naga with a slightly red-face.

“I’m your prisoner. Wouldn’t you kill me, were I to run away at my own convenience?”
“Back then, you probably saw me releasing all the captives, right? I planned to let you go too, but well. Had you slipped into the crowd with your friends and escaped, I would have neither chased you nor have any complaint, although the witches might have said something, but…”
“Is that so? So I could just run away? I didn’t consider that far.”

In Raibach’s tone no remorse or disappointment was felt, which was a bit unexpected for Naga.

“What’s wrong? It feels as though you couldn’t care less about that.”

“Ah, well, perhaps you could say so. Anyway, I no longer have a family left.”
“You mean it? Then, what are your plans from now on? If you remain like this, you will end as a slave of the witches. I’ve got the feeling that neither you nor the witches would wish for something unpleasant as that. As expected, maybe I should seize the opportunity and release you.”

As Naga said that, Raibach directed a serious look at him.

“Hey, Dragon King.”
“What? Why are you being formal?”

“I wonder if you can make me into your subordinate.”

At his words, Naga opened his eyes slightly wide.

“Are you serious?”
“Uh, no, how should I put it…. I’m not even sure myself about that.”

Was Raibach, who replied, mocking himself or hiding his embarrassment? Perhaps, he was filled with something else? Somehow, a smile with mixed feelings appeared on his face.

Naga talked to such a Raibach in a nice and cold manner.

“Becoming my subordinate would mean, at the same time, being on the side of the witches, i.e., becoming an ally of your god’s enemy. In other words, you too will be considered as one and fight against humans as ‘god’s enemy’. Are you okay with that?”
“To begin with, I wasn’t much of a fanatical believer. What’s more…..”

Raibach reached out his hand toward the cup and brought it near his mouth, after which, he drank up the remaining wine in one go.

Sigh – Once he exhaled and put the cup back down, Raibach carried on as he made eye contact with Naga.

“I don’t plan on becoming a subordinate of the witches, but you. That is to say, Dragon King’s underling.”

“That would probably be the same. After all, I’ve befriended the witches, which makes me an enemy of humans. As expected, by becoming my underling, and therefore, an ally of the witches, you would turn humanity into your enemy?”

At Naga’s remark, Raibach shook his head from side to side composedly.

“No, it’s certainly not the same. At least, this is what I believe.”

A shade of confusion appeared on Naga’s face for the first time.

“……What do you mean?”

“Simply serving Dragon King doesn’t make me a subordinate of the witches. Even if I’m to work for them, in the end, it’s Dragon King who’s giving them orders. Now that I think about that, don’t I sound like making an excuse to myself?”

Haha – Hearing his words, Naga laughed.

“That’s indeed an unexpected quibble coming from you.”
“I don’t particularly mind, so it’s fine. Didn’t you say before that the end justifies the means?”
“Yeah, I think that’s what I said.”
“What’s more, there’s no reason for me to tell you a lie. Since my youth, I’ve been constantly serving in the army, so I’ve gained a mass of experience. Back then, I used to fight with the witches, but the majority of my battles were against other human soldiers.”

Chuckle – Raibach chuckled under his nose.

“Human have been killing each other in the name of god. Regardless of whether they were humans or the witches, I-, we, would continue to swing with swords, shoot arrows, kill our

enemy, and die from their hands. There would be no time for us to ponder on things like who was our enemy or what was right in what we did. Just as being told, we would pick our weapons and fight for survival. That's it. If you order me to pick a weapon and fight your enemy, then it's no different from what I've been doing until now."

As soon as he paused after speaking loudly in one breath, Raibach scratched his head as if feeling a bit shy.

"…..Guess I've made another excuse to myself."

"You mean it?" – Naga, who replied, fixed his gaze upon Raibach.

Was it due to him being unable to endure the pressure coming from Naga's sight? Raibach extended his hand and poured more red liquid into his cup.

The moment he brought the cup near to his mouth, Naga uttered with dignity.

"Fine, got it. I shall make you into my underling."

Raibach's face rose up energetically and looked as though brimming with expectations.

"For real?!"
"I'm not lying, but, let me ask you once again."

Standing up while having a grave expression, Naga looked down at Raibach and said:

"By becoming my underling you agree to fight against the humans til my vision of the new world is fulfilled. Perhaps, there will be another battle waiting after the previous one. You're telling me you can continue to swing your sword at humans, right? And endure slanders such as being labeled as 'god's enemy', right?"
"Y, Yes."
"I'm going to tell you this, but, it's not like I'll always resort to this type of kindhearted fighting style, you see? This time, I only saved all of your comrades because I deemed it would serve a purpose in the future. On the other hand, if I consider killing them all to be more convenient, then I may not hold back, you know?"

At Naga's sharp glint in his eyes and intimidating air overflowing from his body, Raibach felt an unintentional urge to move back while he was sitting. Nevertheless, he somehow endured that and strained his voice.

"Y….Yes, I don't care about that."

The fighting spirit dwelling inside of Naga suddenly disappeared.

"Understood. I'll make you into my subordinate, therefore, work your fingers to the bone for my sake."

After that, Naga gave a broad smile.

"That's because I properly reward those who serve me."

Naga was pleased. He hadn't thought he would be able to make a subordinate this quick.

He, who possessed an eye for anticipating the future, had a premonition that his subordinates would become a breakthrough for realizing his plan.

Raibach faced toward the smiling Naga and bowed down instinctively.

"I, I'm looking forward to working with you."
"If that's settled, we shall let the witches now about you becoming my underling. Follow me."

Being in good mood and in high spirits, Naga took Raibach along with him and left the room.
17

"Oi, Harrigan, there's something I'd like to discuss with…."

Once Naga and Raibach stepped inside a large room where the merrymaking of the witches had been held, most of the witches were drunk and dancing while being naked.

"Eh?"
"Ah…."

As soon as the witches noticed Naga and Raibach, they ceased their dancing and singing, and a strange, or rather, ominous silence dominated in the room.

"Umm, we will be back later."
"I, I guess it's much better that way."

Naga and Raibach turned right with stiff faces as they planned to leave at a quick pace. Despite that,

The moment they stepped out with one foot, their bodies turned instantly heavy, making them stumble.

“Uooooh?”

Raibach and Naga recovered back their weight immediately after falling on their knees. They both tried to stand up hurriedly and break up, however, they couldn’t make it in time as the witches were already surrounding them.

“You have some guts to peek at us and think you can get away with that, don’t you, Naga?”

Harrigan, whose hair went around in circles, was nude.

“Geez, Naga-san, as expected, it should’ve been better to gouge out your eyes, right?”

Ais, who pushed out her hands, was naked as well.

“I think gouging out their eyes is too clement for them. It would be better for us if we cut off both their legs and arms so that they can’t peek again.”

The air surrounding Yuuki jumbled together and her 2 bundles of long hair fluttered. Obviously, she too was naked.

“I shall burn the-m. So that not a single trace of them remain-s.”

Lela, who held a charm in her hand, was nude as well.

“How about punching? Punching them to death? Until all their bones are completely broken? Haaaaa!”

Putting up her fist, which released its metallic gloss, Kay too was nude. Not just her fist but also her whole body – including her nipples as well – was radiating with a metallic luster. Should one describe that as strange or perhaps uncanny? Either way, it was a mysterious view.

“I think drowning them to death will be the most painful method.”

While expanding and contracting lumps of red liquid in the air – most likely grape wine – Nonoel approached in a staggering manner. She too was naked.

“Kukuku, so you wanted to see me naked that badly, Dragon King? If so, you should have come and made a request like a real man in front of me. To think you would peek on me sneakily like that, it’s indeed a disgrace even for someone known as the Dragon King.”

Placing her hand on her waist and bending her chest backward, Vita laughed while being naked like the rest.
Originally, if a girl was to bend backward, there would be clear unevenness protruding, however, in Vita's case, none could be found.

The other witches, who looked much the same as the previous ones, or perhaps less, surrounded Naga and Raibach in multitude – although it wasn't such a great number – while looking at them with an ominous light dwelling inside their eyes.

"Oi, you girls, come back to your senses! To begin with, I wasn't the one to peek. It was you who showed me your appearance!"

Despite Naga criticizing and objecting, no truth nor justice would reach someone who was drunk.

"He's making excuses, isn't he~~~?"
"He's evading, right~~~?"
"He's trying to deceive us, right~~~?"
"He's turning on us, isn't he~~~?"

While shouting one by one, the witches rushed at Naga and Raibach.

The two of them tried to stand up, but nevertheless, they would quickly tumble back.

"Forget about what you saw here!"
"Forget it completely!"
"If you can't do that, then die!"

The witches approached en masse and kicked the rolling Naga and Raibach using their feet.

For the time being, they both covered their heads with their hands, trying to protect themselves from a swarm of dispatched kicks. Thanks to that, they were able to keep their heads safe, however, the witches didn't spare other parts of their body.

Naga somehow tried to stop them by looking up, but,

(Huh? T, This angle is?!)

"Wai, girls, this angle is no good! It's no good awaawaaw!"
"Errrk! I'm going to be killed. Even though I went through the trouble of becoming the Dragon King's subordinate, I'm going to be killed from being kiiicked."
"Eh?"

At Raibach's shriek, Harrigan ceased to move.

"Oi, everyone, wait."

Harrigan, who calmed down the other witches, directed her question at Raibach.

“You, what just did you say just now?”
“N, No, that’s why I’m saying I’ve become the Dragon King’s subordinate….”

Curling up on the floor and holding his head in his hands, Raibach, who resisted the kicks, looked with a glimpse at Harrigan after which he hurriedly turned away his sight.

“What’s the meaning of that, Naga?”
“That’s why I’m telling you I have to let you know about that!”

Naga released his hands from his head and lifted his eyes toward the witches who were surrounding him.

“Speaking of which, I think I mentioned about this angle being honestly no good but, are you fine with that?”

Naga averted his eyes similarly to Raibach.

“…..Hmm?”

Harrigan, who looked down at them both, shifted her eyes a bit at her own body.
She was nude.
Completely nude.
So nude it was terrific.

In case of Raibach, it wasn’t half as bad, as he held down his head and averted his eyes, however, Naga was laying on the floor face up. Certainly, it was an angle which couldn’t be more dangerous.
“Whatttttt?!”

Rather than coming back to their senses, the witches who realized the situation they were put in forgot about their shame, and instead, were besides themselves with rage.

“Die Die Die!”
“Erase all the memory of what you saw and die!”
“Throw out all your brain tissues and die!”

Dosu, kosu, doka, geshi

A further and more harsh swarm of kicks were sent at Naga.

“Uwaa, you, wai, awwawawaww, I’ll die, I’ll seriously die!”

Twisting his body, Naga tried to escape, but, there was nowhere to run away as the witches surrounded them closely packed.

(This is bad; this is honestly bad. I'm seriously going to die from these kicks.)

Were he to oppose a drunkard who had lost any means of reasoning, Naga would most likely worsen his situation, but nonetheless, he had the feeling it was the only option for him to survive.

By the time Naga resolved himself and tried to move his hand,

"Wait a moment! He's going to die! The Dragon King is really going to die! Are you fine with killing him like that?!"

Raibach, who shouted, covered Naga with his whole body as if trying to protect him.

"This person is your ally! The who who's supposed to create your world!"
"Umm…"

With that, Harrigan and the rest stopped their kicking.

"Raibach, seems like you don't understand what's being talked about, do you?"
"That's why, the Dragon King has been telling you that all the time."
"It's the first time I hear about what you say."
"No, he has been telling you that countless of times for a while, you know?"
"You mean it? Then, I wonder if you can't let us know."
"B, Before that, could everyone please put something on? Otherwise, the talk won't proceed."
"A…Ah, that's right. It's just as you say."

The witches who came to their senses a little pulled back their legs and turned around.

"By the way, you didn't see it, right?"

Raibach waved his hands with all might and shook his head at his best after being stared by Harrigan.

"I didn't, I didn't."
"If you had seen it, I thought about gouging out your eyeballs, dismembering your body after smashing all of its bones, and throwing it to wolves as a pet food, but—-"
"I didn't see even a tiny little bit, so honestly, rest assured."
"Then, I guess that's fine. Still, what about you Naga?"
"No, I haven't seen anything, so don't worry."

"I wonder who should be the one to say that."

Despite her thinking that, Harrigan also thought her carelessness was partially responsible for what had happened, so she ceased any further inquiring.

“Ah… since we’ll be changing, go outside and wait.”

(Rather than changing, you should already be putting something on you!)

Naga wanted to retort that way, but he thought he would only annoy them at this late hour. Together with Raibach, he silently went outside to the hallway and waited for them to be called in.

18

After a while of waiting,

“You can come in.”

Being called out to, Naga and Raibach entered in once again.
Both of them could feel relieved as everyone was properly wearing their clothes.

(I’ve always thought their small clothes are as good as being naked, but, looking back at what happened, I can understand it’s far better for them to wear something.)

Naga exhaled a sigh of relief inside of him.

“Naga, come and sit here. Same goes for you, Raibach.”

Naga and Raibach sat down at prearranged seats near a wall after being urged by Harrigan. As they leaned against the wall, the witches also sat down while surrounding the two in a half-circle.

“Then, what’s the meaning of him becoming your subordinate?”

Harrigan asked as if being eager.

Among the other witches, there were those who looked at Naga and Raibach curiously, those who looked strangely, others – doubtfully, and yet another – reproachfully. Besides them, witches who averted their eyes in shame were also present, however, those were a minority.

“Ah, that would be, you see—”

Naga revealed his exchange with Raibach, as well as the whole story behind him deciding to make Raibach into his underling.

“I knew you would later approve of the idea, but I deemed it was necessary to make the decision on the spot.”
“Hm, is that so?”
“I also had thought it would benefit you, which was the reason why I decided to do so, you

see. That's all I wanted to convey."
"I guess you're right. When it comes to establishing a world for both us and the humans, having allies is an indispensable thing."

Saying that, Harrigan nodded in agreement.
Because the majority of the witches from the Heindler clan, such as Ais, Lela, Kay, and Nonoel, agreed too, nobody seemed to particularly complain or object. Except for one person.
Naturally, that person was Yuuki. She was the only one to stare blatantly and pretentiously at Naga and Raibach with a much displeased face

"Is there something you want to say, Yuuki? If so, say it now."
"Not really. Isn't it fine as long as Hari-nee approves of your decision?"

Should one say that Yuuki had become more mature too? She wasn't the same blind and stubborn person, whom she was when they first met.

(If that's true, then great. Still, I wonder.)

Not letting anyone else learn about his thoughts, Naga,

"Is that so? Sorry about that."

He lowered his head.
And Raibach bowed down deeply as well.
Harrigan exchanged a somewhat warm look with Yuuki

"T, That's why, you're greatly mistaken if you think I'm glad of becoming that guy's ally!"

Yuuki, who couldn't bear that situation uttered those words with an abusive-like tone.

"Yuuki, you're going too far with your words. Raibach is already…"
"Ah, that's okay, Ane-san, I don't mind about that."

Since Raibach shook his head on sides, Harrigan held her tongue, but then, she immediately looked at him with doubtful eyes.

"By the way…. you're calling me Ane-san? Do you think I'm older than you?"
"Ah, no, I'm sorry about that, Somehow, it feels like you're giving off a strong appeal, so…."
"W, Well, I wonder if it's fine to consider it that way."

Harrigan coughed at once and stated.

"If it's Naga's decision, then I won't be the one to judge. We shall approve you becoming Naga's underling."

“Thank you, Harrigan. Speaking of which,”

Naga moved his face toward Vita, who had been silent for a while.

“How about you, girls? Do you mind if that’s guy becomes my subordinate?”
“Well, I wonder about that.”

Raibach stirred his muscle uncomfortably as Vita threw a glance at him.

“After all, it’s what you’ve decided. I don’t plan to look for any excuse, and the same goes for my daughters.”
“You mean it? I appreciate that.”

However – Saying this, Vita threw a challenging look at Naga.

“But, provided that man betrays us, we won’t have any mercy on him, you know? If that happens, I shall make him so heavy that all the bones and joints in his body get smashed and his muscles get torn.”

“Rest assured. Not even I will forgive those who plan on becoming my ally just to betray me. Absolutely not. I’ll tear this guy apart even before Vita does.”
“Then, fine. I shall acknowledge this man as Dragon King’s underling. Are you okay with that, my daughters?”

One couldn’t tell whether their answers were optimistic or pessimistic, but, they all were of the same opinion.

“Excellent. From now on, Raibach is officially my subordinate. Since I am an ally of the witches, Raibach too has become one. Having this guy is truly delightful! Speaking of which, Harrigan. Now that you’ve acquired your first human ally, what’s your thoughts on that?”

“H…hm, that’s right.”
“If things go well like this, perhaps creating the world we wish for might be easier than what we had thought.”

Harrigan put a slightly wry smile on her face after listening to Naga’s words.

(There’s no way for it to be that simple. But, perhaps one should be more bold and optimistic when putting their life into something. Be that as it may, even if it’s just for giving my daughters more hope, should I accept his offer?)

Harrigan, who was thinking this, leaned her body forward and replied vigorously.

“True. For the sake of creating a new world, we have to rise and make more allies like Raibach. If we increase them one by one like this, then establishing a new country of the witches isn’t that far from being realized.”

“Agreed. Well then, now that Raibach has become my underling, let’s celebrate! Let’s celebrate a new chapter in your future! Drink, sing, get undressed, and dance!”

“Ohh, that’s right. Let’s become lively at onc…Wha? No no no, wait wait! Why are you bringing that topic back up?!”
“E, Eh? Am I wrong?”
“You are! If you want to get undressed and dance that badly, then do it together with Raibach!”

At Harrigan’s retort, sounds of whistles and jeering came from the direction of other witches.

“No, even if I was to dance naked with this guy, I won’t enjoy it at all, you know?”
“This is what I’m trying to tell you.”
“That’s why, we will no longer undress. And even if we decide to, we’ll smash your eyes before doing so.”
“Ah, shall I smash them? I, can do it, completely.”
Because Ais extended her hands and stepped forward, Naga fervently waved both his hands in front of him.

“No no, I won’t do that, so don’t worry. Even if you girls were to denote your intention of doing so, I and Raibach will leave the place straight away.”
“Huh…..? That’s so boringg.”

Ais, who moved both her thumbs in the air, in a manner of squeezing something, looked to be much unsatisfied.

“No no, don’t say it like you’re regretting not being able to smash my eyes. More importantly, you too shouldn’t drink any more than that, right? Right, Ais?”
“What are you talking about? I’m not drinking at all?”

Ais stared at Naga.

Naga turned his sight at Harrigan as if seeking for a help; nonetheless, he was flatly refused by her.

“You should be okay as long you don’t come near Ais.”

(No, rather than that, it’s more troublesome to have her approach me while being drunk.)

Naga looked around him for help, but, nobody would lend him a hand. Rather, nobody wanted to end up like him.

“Ah… well, I think I’ll go and stay in my room silently.”
“I too will keep you a company.”

In the end, not being able to participate in the banquet or watch the witches dancing and singing, the two of them ate and drank obediently inside their room.

19

Like that, Naga acquired his new subordinate, Raibach.
In other words, he was the first ever human ally of the witches, who had been repeatedly opposing humans for 2-300 years of both their history. Nevertheless, lots of the witches were still unaware of that, or couldn't understand it yet.
On the other hand, Naga knew, as well as Raibach himself, that Raibach had become an existence that would become a breakthrough, or rather, a bridgehead, for establishing a new world where both the witches and humans can live together.

(The biggest spoil of this battle isn't Ein Fort but this man. This guy is also a tremendously big asset for the witches.)

Naga believed this to be true.

エピローグ1

Epilogue 1

The witches fell asleep as a result of them getting drunk and being exhausted from making an uproar. Following that, Naga, Harrigan, and Vita moved to a separate room.
Facing each other, the three of them were sitting in a circle in front of appetizers and wine brought from the banquet.

“Your tactic was, once again, splendid this time, Naga. I didn’t expect us to be able to capture the fort that easily.”

As Harrigan said so, Vita nodded in agreement.

“Umu, it was indeed a brilliant trick. The first time I heard about it, I wasn’t sure what you were talking about, and thought you were just blowing your own horn. Nevertheless, we were able to take over the fort without producing any sacrifices on either side, which was surprising. You’re a big deal. Perhaps, your name, which stands for the Dragon King, isn’t just for show.”

Not even Harrigan was fully confident about Naga’s words, regarding not making any casualties. Nevertheless, with Vita and the rest of her family also doubting the success of his plan, it was certain, their anxiety was nothing more than just mere criticism.

However, just as Naga had told them, they managed to capture the fort without losing anyone on either side.
Being much pleased at that great battle result, Harrigan and Vita praised his strategy. Still, Naga himself didn’t appear to be quite in high spirits.

“This time’s strategy wasn’t that much of a big deal, you know?”
“Is that… so?”
“Yes. This is just a reasonable outcome, considering the fact I was able to grasp and put together your abilities. You could even say it was bound to happen.”
“Are you being humble, or perhaps, boasting of yourself? Your manner of speaking is difficult to understand.”

Vita spoke while laughing, but, Naga wouldn’t smile.

“What’s more, it was thanks to the wind blowing in our direction, you see. Be it war or gambling, the ability to predict the course of action is what’s essential.”

(Still, even that is a difficult thing to do, and most likely, impossible for a common soldier to carry out. Be that as it may about his abilities, but there’s no doubt that this man, who goes by the name Dragon King, holds the power to command people and see through any event.)

Vita, who ceased to smile, looked at Naga while picturing those things.

“The problem lies in what’s next. We still don’t know what course of action will the future take.”

At his words, Harrigan and Vita tightened their expressions.

“In other words, are you talking about whether or not the human army will try to retrieve this fort?”

Naga nodded gravely.

“Back then, I told the other witches it was unlike to happen so as to calm them down, but, with the Kasandora Kingdom suffering one more defeat this time, there’s probably no way for those guys to leave things as they are.”
“Well then, Dragon King. Are you telling us they might consider taking immediate measures in order to retrieve this place? Even though they’ve already suffered 2 major loses?”
“That’s hard to tell. Certainly, Kasandora Kingdom’s mobilization power was around 2000 soldiers…. wasn’t it? Harrigan?”
“Umu, that’s right. Despite saying so, their numbers may slightly increase if they decide to go at full force without thinking of the consequences.”
“They have already lost 500 people from the previous battle at Schweiz River. This time, there were no casualties among their soldiers, still, I’d doubt if those who escaped will dare to face us again. Speaking of which, I want to confirm something before that, but…”

Naga looked in turns at Vita and Harrigan.

“It’s just my intuition, but I thought before that there would be lots of instances where ordinary soldiers and commanding officers wouldn’t belong to a king and feudal lords as a result of the previous ones retiring. How does it work in practice?
“I too am not knowledgeable about the military structure of humans, but, if we make the Kasandora Kingdom an example and assume the soldiers don’t belong to them, then there are 2 possible options.”

As Harrigan said it, Vita took control of their conversation.

“The first is that they are mercenaries. In this world, people who are broke will be the easiest to conscript as they need a way to maintain their regular stipend. These sorts of people will fight regardless of who commands them. And then, another one is soldiers dispatched by nobles and small feudal lords from domestic lands, who are from the so-called groups of families and adherents.”
“I see. Indeed, that concept doesn’t vary much from what I felt back in my world.”
“As long as the Kasandora Kingdom has enough funds, they can replenish the lack in their army. I wouldn’t be surprised if their main force was to consist of mostly mercenaries, you see. There might be a chance that the Kasandora Kingdom is, right now, desperately trying

to recruit new soldiers."
"With that, does it mean there will be no significant drop in their mobilization power?"

Naga asked while making various calculations in his mind. As he did so, Harrigan, who had a difficult expression, nodded in agreement.

"It may be that those guards who were stationed here have lost their interest in fighting us, however, there will be plenty of others to replace them with. To begin with, we don't even know how much funds the Kasandora Kingdom has stored within their vault, so…"
"Once the rumor about them suffering another defeat to the witches spreads, is there a chance that……. soldiers will hesitate to join them despite the Kasandora Kingdom trying to recruit them?"
"Yes, but, the war between fellow humans has recently decreased. Since there are now less opportunities for those confident in their skills to flourish, they may be attracted by the war against us and gather in this area."

"I see. We are indeed placed in a difficult situation."

Folding his hands while groaning, Naga suddenly lifted up his face.

"Is it possible for the Kasandora Kingdom to request aid from other countries?"
"I wonder about that."
"Same here."

Harrigan and Vita exchanged looks with each other.

"I guess it's unlikely to happen."

Harrigan responded.

"That's right. It's hard to imagine them requesting cooperation from someone who's just recently changed their status from being that of a mutual enemy. On top of that, they have incurred another defeat against the witches."
"Is that so? Then, is it okay for us not to worry about that matter?"

Naga, who slightly tilted his head, released his troubled face and spoke in a distinct tone.

"Speaking of which, if they to decide to retrieve this fort, it would be nice if they could throw in the same number of soldiers as they did during the previous battle at the Schweiz River."
"That's probably the most they can dispatch. I wonder myself if that number won't reduce a bit, still…."
"True. I also estimate there will be roughly around 1000-1500 of them, but, even that number is large for us. As you know, we only have as many as 40 people to defend this place."
"As expected, is it reckless to fight back….. using everyone?"

“I think I’ve told you before, Naga, but there’s no way we can leave the black forest vacant.”
“Yes. Even among the witches, there are those who are sly and cunning, you see. Were we to leave our domain empty, they would probably try to snatch it away from us.”
“Can’t the witches make a truce and band together?”
“Unfortunately, it’s just as I have said.”

(I have the feeling that my clan also wouldn’t share one…. no, far from that, doesn’t it feel more like they would fight among each other?)

“Well, isn’t it fine?”

Naga, who muttered, shifted back his focus on the actual problem.

“By the time the next battle occurs, we will be protecting this fort. However, our previous trick won’t work a second time.”
“Then, what shall we do? As usual, when it comes to tactics, the discrepancy in our reasoning is so large it makes me feel unpleasant.”

As soon as Harrigan urged, Naga replied quickly.

“Well, when it’s necessary, we can just abandon this fort.”
“What?! Won’t it make all our effort of capturing it meaningless?!”
“That’s not what I mean, Harrigan. In the end, our objective is to create a world where everyone can live peacefully, and not maintaining this fort.”
“N, No…. that may be true, but…”
“But, Dragon King, provided we throw away this place, won’t our plan of achieving that be delayed? Won’t it become more difficult for us to do it?”
“It won’t affect our plan that much. I would understand were we to try a bit harder in protecting a castle or a country from being snatched away, but being persistent about this small fort won’t do us any favors.”

Harrigan and Vita looked at each other’s face as if being unable to comprehend his words, and then, turned their eyes toward Naga once more.

“In that case, what exactly are we supposed to do?”
“To be more accurate…. It doesn’t seem I’ll be able to knead a counterplan as long there’s not enough information regarding the scope and equipment of the unit in charge of the attack. Don’t you have a witch who specializes in disguise or can shapeshift in your family?”

Harrigan shifted her sight to Vita.

“Fumu, there’s one person like that at my place, still…”

“Can I have that person sneak into the Kasandora Kingdom?”
“It’s not like she can’t, but, in the end you just want to acquire information about the enemy’s mobilization power, equipment, and morale, right?”

“Yes. That’s because this time’s tactic will greatly depend on that information.”
“I wonder if that man, Raibach, happens to know about it.”
“Ah, no, I’m not sure if he would have any information about a newly formed unit designated for recapturing this fort…. Wait wait, that’s right!”

Naga suddenly hit his laps.

“Have you come up with some idea?”
“I think not just an idea but a solution for everything. How about I sneak inside the Kingdom and check the information by myself?”
“W…What on earth?!”

Both Harrigan and Vita opened their eyes wide.

“You shouldn’t do such a reckless thing.”
“Why? Do I look any different from an ordinary man? If I don’t, shouldn’t it be fine for me to walk around cities without being suspected?”
“No, that’s not my point. You, probably know nothing about the topography of that place nor about this world’s languages and customs. You may be able to understand their words, somehow, thanks to Lela’s charms, but if you do anything clumsily, your identity might be exposed. Is gathering the information by yourself something worthy of such risk?”
“I’ll have Raibach with me?”
“….Eh? You don’t mean to say you’re going to have him guide you, right?”
“Of course I do. Isn’t that place his home turf? What’s more, he’s familiar with its local customs, so I should be able to walk freely, no?”
“No no, he has acquaintances there, right? Aren’t you bound to be questioned because of that?”
“Raibach can walk with his face hidden, you see. And if you, Vita, can lend me that previously mentioned witch, I see no problem for the three of us to go there.”
“Saying that you see no problem, it feels as though you’re casually going to a town market to buy goods……”

Harrigan, who said so, had a dumbfounded expression. Not just her, Vita also felt the same way.

“Don’t they say that even audacity is no different from a ‘common thoughtlessness’ when taken to the extreme?”
“Aren’t you saying some wise words there, Vita?”
“Are you in the position of praising others?!”
“Honestly, you don’t have to be that angry. Does that witch of yours have any objections?”
“No…..”
“Furthermore, a group consisting of 2 men and a woman should probably grab no attention from the soldiers and local people there, right? If it’s something related to customs or land features, leaving it to Raibach will do. Assuming that my communication with other people turns bad, I can have Raibach and your witch to talk in my stead.”

“Surely, it’s not like there are no foreigners with black hair like you, but….”
“Then, it’s all right.”
“You’re, indeed, quite optimistic.”
“That’s wrong, that’s wrong. Rather than being optimistic, I just want to gather some proper information regarding the enemy before a battle, you know?”
“You mean it?”
“That’s what I mean.”

Vita switched her gaze from Naga to Harrigan.

“Harrigan, what’s your opinion?”
“That’s right. Shouldn’t it be okay to entrust Naga with that task?”
“Still, is it safe to let just Raibach and Dragon King go?”
“No, I’m going to assign one more person from this side as their guard.”
“However, there’s no telling whether or not that guy will turn Naga in due to him getting homesick, right?”

Chuckle – Naga chuckled under his nose at Vita’s statement.

“You girls think that Raibach will rat me out? You’re making light of him way too much.”
“……Is that so?”
“For real?”
“After all, he’s become an ally of the witches, of the heinous witches, who are seen as the enemy of humankind. An ally of those who should be exterminated.”

Harrigan and Vita warped their faces in displeasure.

“There’s no way for him to make such a decision with a half-baked preparedness.”
“…….That may be true, but, whether or not he can protect you during a crucial time is yet another issue.”
“Then, Harrigan, do I understand that one of your witch, together with the one from Vita’s place, will tag along with me?”

Naga looked quite indifferent, nevertheless, Vita and Harrigan had sour expressions.

“It would be troublesome, were I to overestimate you, so how about working together with Elysione? Perhaps, she will help you…… one way or another?”
“Elysione?”
“Her skill will come in handy when you decide to escape.”
“I see, is that so? Still, that girl might stand out because of her height.”
“Fret not. It should be fine as long we dress her as a man.”
“Ah, so there was that method as well?”

“I wouldn’t say that her height is a dime a dozen among men….. but, with just her walking, she shouldn’t attract that much attention.”
“Excellent. Well then, let’s quickly proceed with the preparations for the infiltration.”

“You’re pretty short-tempered.”
“You shouldn’t consider there to be that much of time til the enemy strikes.”

Saying that, he looked in turns at Vita and Harrigan.

“Got it, got it. Then, I shall progress with the preparations starting tomorrow.”
“That’s right. However, I’m worried that Elysione might not be able to meet up to your expectations when it comes to deep thinking or playing by ear, as she’s basically a simpleton. Wouldn’t it be better to forward someone who’s smart from Harrigan’s side?”
“You mean itso? Got it. I’ll designate 2 people here.”
“I too will appoint one more person besides Elysione.”

Naga made a deep nod.

“I’ll leave the selection of people in your care. I’m counting on you.”

エリュシオーネの魔法

マンテラからマンテラへ移動することが可能。
どんなに距離が離れていようとたちどころに移動できる優れた魔法だが、
肉体しか移動させることができないので、マンテラの下は基本的に裸である。
また、人を連れて移動することも出来る。

エピローグ2

Epilogue 2

Granvista, a fortified city built in a place that acted as a door leading to other borderland areas.
This city that served as the capital of the Great Earldom of Granvista was also the location of Old Church's headquarters from which it executed its jurisdiction. It was also the place where Aiba, the district supervisor, was stationed.

"Oh my, if it isn't Jeweljude-dono."

Aiba, the district supervisor, spread his arms and invited the man in after standing up from his chair.
The man had a tall, large trunk covered with armor. His face was completely hidden by a helmet called a Ballerifram, and a long coat, called a Salcolt, extended from his top to his feet.
The ornament appearing on his coat was a crest depicting a double-headed lion, which indicated the man's belonging to a holy chivalric order.
He was so tall that his helmet almost hit the door's lintel when entering inside the room.
The man reached the front of Aiba's office's desk with a calm walking cadence, however, every time he made a step, the floor gave off the feeling as if it was trembling.
Just the standing posture of his completely armored, large body released an aura that made it difficult for those inside the room to breathe.

"You've done a great effort by coming all the way here, Jeweljude-dono."
"Don't mention it. If it's a call from you, then I shall rush even to the black forest of the witches."

What Jeweljude said could also be understood in an idiomatic way, meaning – 'rushing until the end of the world' or 'rushing to hell itself'.

"Please feel at ease."

Aiba, who said so, sat again in his chair.
Loosening his at attention posture, Jeweljude took off his helmet while bending his legs a bit.
What appeared from underneath the helmet was a stern and gallant face appropriate for his large build.
Once he put down the huge, heavy helmet at his feet, Jeweljude straightened up his back again and confronted Aiba.

"Still, Aiba-dono, what's the purpose of you summoning us, the Brigade of 88?"

A combat troop from a holy chivalric order would usually consist of 500 units, to which one would refer as a 'brigade'. However, in this case, the word seemed to carry the meaning of corps appointed for extermination of the God's enemy with no fixed base.
Among the Old Church's daring and resolute combat troops, Jeweljude was the one in charge of the 3rd brigade.

There was a reason for why only his brigade was recognized as the 'Brigade of 88' instead of being referred to by just its unit number.
Once upon a time, there was fight for hegemony that unfolded between the Old Church and the New Church at full-scale. At that time, being under siege at Fort Resione, the 3rd brigade was heavily exposed to an onslaught coming from the New Church's military forces that consisted of 5000 units.

This fort held an important strategic position as the enemy would link with the rest of their forces if they managed to pass through it. Assuming that happened, the New Church would grow in strength with a total army of 10,000 units and charge at the Old Church's headquarters' city.
Nevertheless, the 3rd brigade was able to endure its enemy's attack and protect the fort for 10 days.
On the 11th day, a rear guard reinforcement sent by the Old Church arrived on the spot, forcing their enemy to abandon their plan and retreat. Despite them only retreating, one could say it was a fierce fight that could decide on the outcome of this defensive battle.
As soon as the rear guard entered the fort, there were just 88 survivors remaining out of the original 500 people.
The 3rd brigade would be later glorified for its valor and exceptional fighting strength, as well as their ardent devotion and steadfast belief for their God. Since then, they became known as the Brigade of 88, and their valor would remain unchanged with the passage of time.
And then, Jeweljude was also one of them, as well as the actual leader of that brigade.

"Recently, the army of Kasandora Kingdom has been falling in disgrace, you see."

It looked as though it was enough for Jeweljude to understand the very reason behind him and his brigade being summoned.

"I wonder if it's about the witches."
"That's right. It's about them."

Standing up, Aiba turned around and looked at a panel laid at his feet. On which, there was a drawn map spread out. He looked at it in an abominable manner.

"For some reason, the witches, who had been secluding themselves inside the black forest, have started to become more active, even to the extent of taking over one of Kasandora Kingdom's forts."

Jeweljude lifted the edges of his mouth.

“Heh? My goodness, could it be that the rumored King of the Witches has finally made his appearance?”
“There’s been no sign indicating that, but….”

As soon as Aiba shrugged his shoulders, he turned back around and faced Jeweljude.

“However, there’s no doubt that something is occurring among the witches. Their battle at the Schweiz River, as well as their capture of Fort Ein went smoothly, and somehow, they didn’t give off the feeling of being dull or sly. At least, this isn’t a fighting style common for the witches.”
“I see. That’s why, you called us.”
“Yes, I’ve summoned you, the merited Brigade of 88, for this purpose.”

“Still, if my memory serves me correctly…. Fort Ein should be a small-scale fort that can house no more than just a few hundred people.”
“It’s just as you say. Apparently, the Kasandora Kingdom put 300 soldiers inside of it after they had suffered their defeat at the Schweiz River.”

Jeweljude, who was a bit surprised, raised his eyebrows.

“And what was the extent of the witches’ strength?”
“To my mind, there should have been around 40-50 of them.”
“40-50?! They were able to capture such a guarded fort with just that many?!”
“Yes. It’s most likely that Fort Ein was brought down with that number.”
“Certainly, if that’s true, the situation isn’t something to be made light of.”

A hue of confusion resurfaced on Jeweljude face which was rare for him.

“Regardless of their number, do you just plan to throw the 500 of us in against the 40-50 of them?”
“No. It won’t be just you. Right now, we are appealing for more soldiers from the neighboring countries. I believe there should be around 3000 units prepared for the extermination of the witches. That’s why,”

Aiba made a slight grin.

“Together with you, that would probably make 3500 units. I’d like for you to extinguish the witches at once.”

(As usual, this guy is saying some nasty things.)

Jeweljude was a fellow adherent who served the Father God and lived devotedly to military service. Nevertheless, even he could sense something running counter to his belief inside Aiba.

(Still, this and that are 2 separate matters. Especially, when it involves the witches.)

“The Brigade of 88 will become the core of this extermination unit. Therefore, I’d like to appoint you as the commanding officer of it. Are you fine with that?”
“As long as it’s you, I have no objections.”
“Then, I would like to entrust you with its management.”
“Do I understand that I should also look for the reason…. as to why the witches have been active lately?”
“Go ahead if you can. However, prioritize your mission first by kicking out the witches and retrieving the fort. If possible, you may also apprehend as many witches alive as possible. Even catching one will do, you see. That’s because they’re suitable for public executions.”

(As one would expect, he and I don’t get along well with each other. Despite that, there’s some truth in what he says about not letting the witches escape. Recently, my skills have become duller as a result of doing nothing but simple battles. Is this a chance for me to rage out of control once again after a long time?)

“Leave it to me, Cardinal Aiba. I, together with the Brigade of 88, won’t let the witches do as they please.”

“I do beseech you, Jeweljude-dono.”
“Notwithstanding, when are we going to commence our tactic?”
“It looks like gathering soldiers, equipment, and army provisions will take some more time. Until then, I intend to have the Kasandora Kingdom participate.”
“Still, will they have enough spare power to join us? After all, they’ve only recently suffered their 2nd consecutive defeat to the witches, right? Speaking of which, if Kasandora Kingdom can take their fort back, then there isn’t any need for us to act, is there?”
“They can’t. But, I’ll have them fight as a form of repentance for disgracing themselves two times, you see. To begin with, I don’t think those fools will be able to retrieve it back by themselves. I couldn’t care less about their fate as long we can decrease the strength of the witches.”

(In the end, they will just act as a stalking horse? Indeed, those from the Kasandora Kingdom are pitiful beings. But even so, it goes without saying they’re paying for their own mistakes. Someone who’s besmirched the name of God is in no position to receive His grace.)

Despite him feeling sympathy for the Kasandora Kingdom, Jeweljude gave up on them.

Not ceasing to smile, Aiba continued to speak.

“The more witches you catch, the more types of execution we can carry out on them, you see. Burning at the stake, beheading, stoning, and even tying them to carts and tearing them apart. Kuku, if those heinous witches beg for mercy, then our Father God shall rise even higher in His prominence. Kukukuku.”

If one was to describe the flame burning inside Aiba’s eyes, it appeared to burn more from insanity, than from his conviction.

(Is this guy…. feeling ecstatic? Well, apart from what he thinks, it's true we cannot let the mischief of the witches pass unnoticed. Behold, you witches, as we shall strike you using our full force and show you our real strength.)

Just as Naga said, the wind was favoring them in their fight against the Kasandora Kingdom. However, a new, formidable enemy had appeared in front of them, of which
Naga was still unaware.

A new disturbance that was yet to come was slowly spreading throughout all surrounding areas.